

Fundamentals of Drawing from Life

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Written and illustrated by Michael

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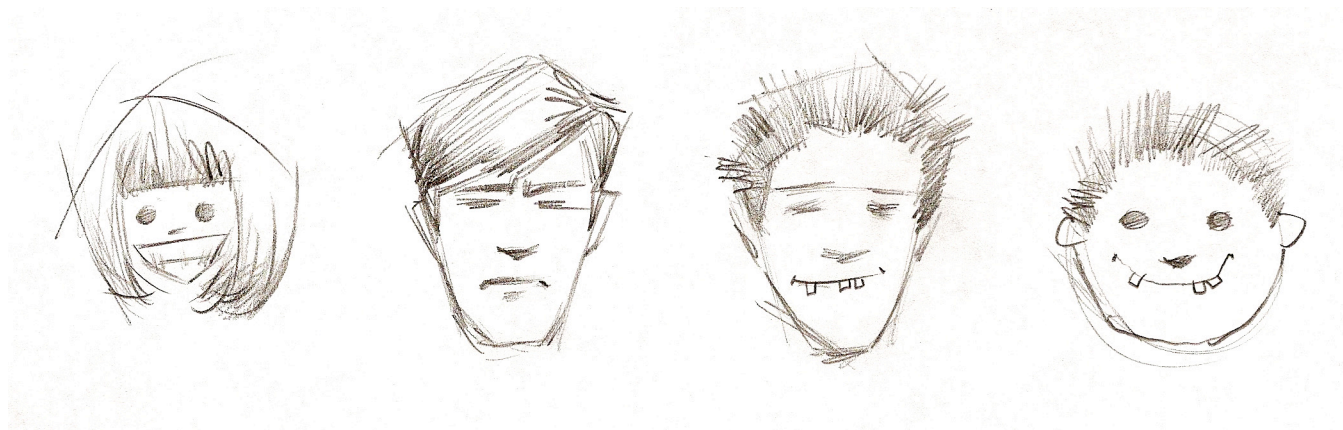
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This book is dedicated to my family, without whom, this book may not have been possible. At least, not as possible as it has become. I'm blessed and thankful.



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To the prospective reader,

I have pursued the art of drawing for almost a decade. In my reflections, I have included in this book only what I have found to be essential to my own development. I have tried to assume nothing about you. If you know nothing prior to picking up this book, this will give you a clear path toward adeptness. If you have already had some training, hopefully this will fill in some things you may have missed, or made clear others you have studied, to give you a full foundation upon which to build. I may not be your first instructor. I certainly will not be your last. I will cover three aspects of drawing because I find no way to have one without the others:

- 1- The philosophy – Why we do what we do and what for. All the intentions in the world are nothing without direction and action.
 - 2- The knowledge – The tools and their context. A tool just sits there without some sort of purpose and a skilled person to wield it.
 - 3- Training exercises – Simple steps to take to develop the tool and your mind.
- Action without intention and means is just a crapshoot; a roll of the dice. The chance of getting a desired result without intention is very small.

Most books seem to only cover one or two of these. As you can see, it's difficult to have one without the other two. They all work together. This book will take you across all three, hopefully with the momentum to continue right on into the world making powerful works of art as you go.

I am also attempting to be as simple and direct as possible. How often do we overcomplicate what is plainly in front of us? Not this time. I have used blunt, possibly harsh, language at times but I do so with the purpose of clarity. I have occasionally repeated myself for emphasis. I have really strived to frame the accomplishments you are embarking upon properly.

Maybe this will lead me to write a few things that marketing departments, legal teams, or publishers would advise against. I don't really care. I can make money doing a million things in this lifetime and I've never heard of anyone getting rich or even making a living off of self-publishing a drawing book. Money is not the reason I have written this book. The purpose for this book is to help people who want to improve their skills so badly that they are willing to do honest work for it. This has been my only concern throughout the writing; to deliver accurate information as directly as possible. How can I help the people who want to help themselves?

What if you don't have any talent? So what? An entire planet's worth of talent is squandered every day. If you think you're talented, you'd do yourself a favor by forgetting about it. Talent or not, nobody develops any abilities without work. You can spend your whole life doodling without any actual knowledge and never get better just like you can read every art book ever written and still not be able to draw anything on your own. You have to combine the two: the right knowledge and the honest work. The sooner you get it out of your own head that you already know it all (or that you're naturally gifted, or talented, or not talented at all, or just arrogant) or that there is such a thing as a shortcut or a cheap trick (if you have thoughts like these), the better off you'll be and the quicker you'll be on the road to becoming more powerful.

It's never been in the interest of the art community or any artist to ever claim they weren't "talented" or "gifted". This creates a mystical force field around them (in the minds of everyone who believes this crap) in attempts to justify lazy, incoherent work. Anyone who creates good work understands the thousands of hours necessary to create it and will happily tell you of the monumental struggle it has been for them to create the thing.

I believe anyone with the dexterity to write their own name, eyesight, a working brain, a hand, a feeling about life, the willingness to suffer, and the motivation to honestly keep pushing themselves to do better can draw (or do anything). If you have these few qualities, it just takes time. If you don't, then you've got to find something to fit your physical limitations, or find out how to get those qualities before beginning. I find that almost anyone meets the physical requirements. Most people who fall short do so because they lack a feeling about living, the willingness to suffer, or motivation to push past where they already are; where they are comfortable.

If you practice for 6 months and notice no improvement in your drawing (or anything), it's not a problem with your eyes or your hand. Maybe you are lacking passion about life? Maybe you are not willing to suffer? Maybe you are not honest with yourself about putting in your best effort? Have you gotten comfortable (which is not the same as happy) with where you are at? If you practice for 6 months, come back and find no improvement in drawing (or anything) then put this book down immediately. Go live! Daydream! Adventure! Try new things! Get excited about living! Get invested in who you are and who you want to become! Then you'll find that this (or anything) is possible!

If you're a hobbyist, just drawing for fun, you can still accomplish powerful work. This book is not filled with cheap tricks to make you think you've gotten better in 30 minutes, but real information to help you gain real skills between now and when you die. If you are willing to dedicate (yes, dedicate) 20 minutes a night, every other night for 3 months, you can learn. That is around the base minimum of time and work investment to really start to improve. It's about the same as in anything. Any less than that and you probably won't walk away with much other than theoretical understanding. You're going to get out of drawing what you put into drawing.

I am not saying this to discourage anyone. I am saying this to set some sort of minimal expectation. There is no way to improve your drawing without drawing. It sounds obvious but for a long time I told myself that I should wait to draw until I got more formal training. I told myself that I should wait until I had more practice before I attempted to draw anything. Reflecting back, it doesn't make any sense! How can you get better at drawing without drawing? All I needed to do was sit down and start drawing. Don't be afraid to cut loose!

If you are not sure how you feel about this dedication, set a minimum commitment and try it out. At least 3 months, at least 20 minutes a night, every other night. No slacking. No excuses. Everyone sucks at first. Everyone feels lost at first. This is why you have to stick to the commitment. By sticking to the commitment, giving it your best effort, you'll power through a very difficult time at the beginning. After some time of dedicated, honest practice, you'll be able to better evaluate where you are at and how you feel about the whole thing. I think a lot of people miss out on accomplishing anything because they cannot power through that first wave of frustration and distress. I want to be sure to be clear: Anyone with any expectation of getting skills at drawing (or anything) has to put in a minimum amount of effort. Anyone who puts in the effort gets rewarded. Don't be afraid to kick some ass!

Lastly, all of the information in this book is just a means to an end. Whether you're just starting out or if you're trained and looking to augment your skills, this is a means. It's not about being the most proficient measurer or turning the procedure into a religion. It's about using the information to become better at drawing. I would suggest to you that drawing is just a means (and not just a means to get to painting). It's a means toward producing powerful art. Art itself is a means. It is a means to the end of adding value to life (for yourself and those around you), and glorifying God (if you hold this belief). Whatever is important to you, whatever you are passionate about, art is a means of adding value to it and communicating to the world about it.

Visual art is a visual language. I would challenge you to become as technically proficient as you possibly can for the purpose of being able to communicate as clearly as possible. If your work fails to communicate what you want then it could hardly be considered a successful work. Only a lazy artist who has nothing to say leaves the meaning of the work up to the viewer. When was the last time you read a book by an author who left the subject open for you to determine? Never! Neither should you leave it up to somebody else to interpret what you are trying to say. You also shouldn't leave it up to supplemental means to explain your work. Do you need to watch a movie to understand a good book? Do you need to read a book to understand a good movie? Do you need to read an essay to understand a good song? So why would you ever need a book, movie, or essay in order to understand or explain a good piece of visual art? Good work speaks clearly for itself. The better your command of the language, the better your capacity for articulation of your thoughts and feelings.

Finally, and most importantly, I challenge you to live passionately. This is the only way to live if you wish to have something to say. The work is a reflection of the person. Do you value order or chaos? Do you value clarity or passive aggression? Do you value beauty or ugliness? Do you value honesty or dishonesty? Don't bother answering these to me or anyone else. The answer is in your work and in your life. I won't tell you what to choose or what to say. All I will tell you is to not make a choice out of ignorance or laziness (unless you value those qualities). Make your choice and put the force of your life behind it. Got something to say? Feel strongly about something? Prove it!

-Covington, WA
August 19th, 2011



How to use this book

The goal of this book is not to help you draw as I do, but to provide the tools and inspiration for you to fulfill your own potential. Maybe you can surpass me?

This book contains information on basic fundamentals, the way to put them together (the procedure), knowledge, and philosophy that I have found to be crucial. I don't cover every single good, helpful thing to know when drawing because I want to focus on the most basic, most essential. Once you have a grasp on these tools you can learn more and continue to apply and grow. However, it is impossibly hard to get solid results, drawing from life, without a working understanding of the fundamentals covered here.

One thing to note is that the way these fundamentals are explained is generally the way they are used by artists working from life. I have focused on passing along the principle, the understanding of an underlying observation that is real and that will work. It is important for you to know that I find everything in the book to be essential, it is not necessarily the only way to get a quality result. Certain fundamentals are universal, such as the understanding of relative values. Whereas, the procedure is just one that I have found to be simplest and best for proceeding, it is not the only procedure. If you do not have access to training or help, learning the procedure will be a great aid to you. Imagine climbing to the top of a mountain. Everyone must go upward to reach the top but there are many paths to the summit. In the same way, understanding values is essential but taking the path I present is not.

Why learn this procedure then? You have to start somewhere.

Having a singular way to go about working the drawing will give you the confidence to achieve consistent results. Once you are comfortable working in the procedure I present, you will find ways to alter it according to your preference. Although, it will be the easiest way to learn to stick to one way of doing things until you understand why you do it that way. Once you understand why you do it, then you can start to question why and try to find a better way. You require some understanding first in order to evaluate what is useful or not. This is what I am hoping to provide, that basic platform.

“Absorb what is useful, discard what is useless” –Bruce Lee

It is the goal of this book to pass on as little as is necessary and as little as I find invaluable helpful to allow the reader the space to comfortably develop on their own. Please remember that, outside of fundamentals, I am presenting my way, not the only way to go about drawing.

The exercises are meant as a beginning. They are something simple that the reader can do to practice the fundamentals and develop the skills. In drawing or painting a finished work the artist is presented with innumerable problems to solve. I've tried to present a few basic exercises that simplify the problems to a very basic level so the confidence and understanding can happen quickly. Afterwards I've given a couple suggestions on how to ramp up the difficulty to push onward.

It may be helpful to begin by reading through the whole book. As you study, work on a particular portion at a time. Over time, simple things become intuitive and then your mind can focus on harder problems. You've got to give your mind the time to absorb the simple things first. As often as you can study and practice is as quickly as you will grow. It is the same as working out in the gym. Thirty minutes a day can make you fit over time.

It is important to have a general understanding before asking too many questions. Knowledge serves as the basis for constructive questions. After a basic understanding, then you can start questioning everything. In short, read often, understand the fundamentals, get a grasp on the procedure, practice often, push the difficulty (the limits) of your drawings, achieve adeptness, and then go learn even more from various other sources.

Read. Draw. Thoughtfully analyze. Repeat.



Why draw from life? What about photos?

The subject of this book is specifically about drawing from life, not photos. Taking a photograph and using a pencil and paper are two different ways of interpreting life. The strength of the camera is that it can capture the moment. In a split second, a camera can capture anything in front of a lens. Drawing captures something else entirely. Although you could say that a drawing captures a moment, even further it captures an essence, a truth, a feeling; some combination of these three.

There's nothing wrong with using a photo to help capture the essence, the truth, or the feeling but in my own work I notice that the camera is almost unable to help me. In living the lifestyle of the artist, I am attempting to experience life. I am attempting to get outside and feel the breeze in my face. I am attempting to talk to many people who are very different from what I may already know. I am attempting to go places that I have never been, try things I have never done, and think in ways I have never been taught to think.

“What the great artists do is they are entirely themselves.” –David Foster Wallace

There are solid technical reasons for using photographs (ideally, as little as possible). It might be that you do use, or will use photographs in your future work and it would be helpful to know the limitations you are up against. Since I have spent so much time working from life it has become painfully obvious when an artist is working from a photograph and has experienced very little of the subject in person.

In my own work, I strive for the best possible result. I want to create the most powerful work that I can. What excuse do I have to think otherwise? This doesn't mean that I can achieve perfection. I can't and you probably can't either. It means that I can set my own standard, and the standard I am always trying to hit is the best I can possibly do. For me, I work best when I have the inspiration right in front of my face. In the same way that you would build a house on a solid foundation, having the inspiration right in front of me gives me the best chance for a strong emotional response.

Imagine somebody you care about. Are you more emotionally charged when you are in front of them or in seeing a picture of them? This applies to everything. I've seen a hundred pictures of the Grand Canyon but to go to the place makes you *feel* in ways that the photograph never can. For this reason alone, I see no reason to cheat myself into starting from a lesser fountain of inspiration when I begin working. I want the maximum inspiration, the maximum emotions, the maximum truth in front of me so I can achieve the maximum possible result.

If you have to work from a photo, at least try to experience the thing you want to draw in person. Take the photo yourself so you can control the limitations as much as possible and paint some studies of the subject if you can. Doing this will help you to have the next best chance of success with working from the photo.

When you see a thing in the world there is no filter. It's the thing in front of your eyes and nothing else. When you look at a photo you are looking at how a machine has interpreted the reality you used to see with only your eyes. This is why it's a great tool for capturing a moment (especially for a memory) because it can record exactly what is there. Unfortunately, the camera is not nearly as powerful as your eye and your brain and it is not discerning at all.

The camera captures *everything*. Literally. If there is a boring or superfluous detail in front of the lens, it records that every bit as detailed as the thing that is important. The camera has no feeling and it is not able to quantify anything. Just because the camera recorded it does not mean you have to draw it.

Also, the camera will distort the reality in front of it. A fisheye lens is a great example but all lenses do this to even a small degree. You have to be on the lookout! It will slightly distort shapes. If you draw the distortions your drawing might look odd for no apparent reason (and the reason is because you copied a photograph). The camera is also not able to record nearly so many values and colors as the eye can see. It is not as sensitive to light as the eye is. You have to watch for this! Your eye can see infinitely more colors, shapes, and values than a camera ever can record, even if it's able to burn that image onto the film or hard drive. There are technical limitations to how many colors or values it can interpret, and worse, it interprets these things indiscriminately. The camera does not care if, in simplifying values, the thing looks incoherent to you. The camera does what it wants! Whereas you, in your task as an artist, must make clear to the viewer what it is you want them to see, and then, to feel.

Lastly, even if you work from photos entirely, it will still benefit you to learn to draw from life and to do so as often as possible. I don't write this to vilify working from photos, only to put into context the disadvantage that it puts on the artist. The world, the people, and places in it, are the ultimate inspiration for our communication, for our storytelling, and the closer you can get to the fountain of that inspiration, the better your chances of saying something powerful.



Speed

When working from life, time is limited. The sun is moving in the sky. The person cannot sit in front of you forever. The fruit will rot away. Heck, you're even going to die at some indeterminate time, so hurry it up, right? It's a natural impulse to try and go as quickly as possible. When doing finished work (such as a commissioned piece) work as fast as is comfortably possible but when practicing, *slow down!* When doing the exercises, do not emphasize speed; do not even think about it. Focus on accuracy and understanding. Focus on doing the work correctly. You will find that, over time, you will get much faster *in addition* to becoming more accurate. Rushing to complete the work is irrelevant if you cannot get the result you desire. Chase the proficient result (the accuracy, the understanding) and your speed will continually improve. Chase the quickness and your accuracy and understanding will suffer.

Relativity

You will encounter the idea of relativity in the descriptions of the fundamentals but I want to make mention of it here so the idea is clear. The thing that makes working from life so difficult is that everything is relative. The relativity opens up the door for all sorts of artistic choice. This is why you could take 10 amazing painters, set them all up in the same place painting the same subject at the same time, and end up with 10 very different paintings. Each painting would even look "right" or "correct". The thing that the 10 artists would understand is that in life there are certain truths about a subject that you might be looking at (for example, the person they are painting has a head, they have two eyes, etc) but the way they *feel* about these truths will guide the overall expression of the work!

The concept of relativity is everywhere in the making of the art. How big or small one eye should be drawn is relative to the other eye, relative to the head, relative to the person. How light or dark something appears is in relation to how light or dark everything is around it. How big or small you should draw is in relation to your tools, the size of the paper, what all is going to fit in the composition, and what you want to communicate. Each drawing is a series of relative problems. This is why there are few hard and fast rules but many methods and principles of problem solving.

How good you are and how good you should be

Never compare yourself to somebody else. Don't look at the person next to you in a drawing session and think that it should be you, or that you should be that good, or that you suck. These thoughts are an emotionally strangling distraction. How good or not you actually are has very little to do with your perception of how good or not that you think you are. Even further, your perception can get in the way of each drawing or exercise that you're doing. However good your skills are, even if you have never picked up a pencil with intent to draw before reading this, are exactly what they are without you telling yourself that you're the greatest or worst artist who has ever lived.

Do not pressure yourself! Your competition isn't the person next to you, the top student at art school, or any historical master. Your competition is your potential. How do you know what your potential is? There is only one way to find out what your potential truly is: attempting to fulfill it. You have to try to find out. Relax and have fun. Use each day, each hour, each moment as the next chance to push yourself on toward a greater height. You are as good as you are, regardless of how you or anyone else thinks. How good should you be? Show us! Find out!



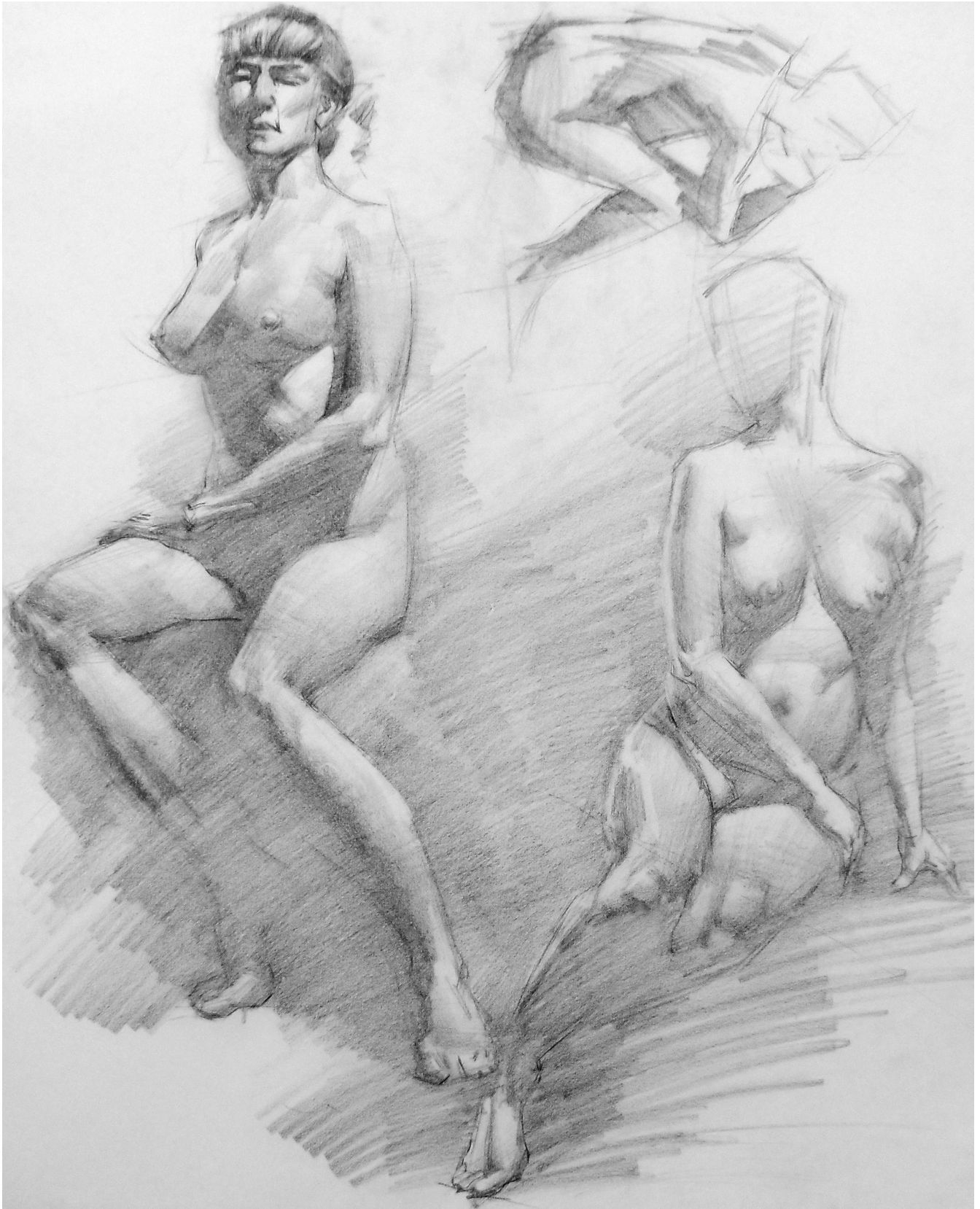
What is possible

I often hear people say something like “I was never able to draw” or “I don’t have the talent” or “some people are born with it and some people aren’t”. There are two big problems with these ideas. One, if drawing cannot be learned, why are there countless art schools? (or this book?) Two, how does anyone know, theoretically, what is possible? The only way to know with any certainty how good you can become at drawing is to give it your best effort over a period of time. Not for a day, not for a week, but sustained effort over a long period of time.

We never really know what is possible, even if we think we do or experts have pronounced it so. Few thought the American revolutionaries could defeat the British. Bruce Lee became a better martial artist after injuring his back and being told he would probably never walk again. A hundred years ago, did people think it would be possible to hold a piece of plastic up to their head and talk with a person on the other side of the planet in real time? Human history is rife with examples of people who refused to believe that a goal was impossible. If we believe something to be impossible and therefore do not attempt it, (or attempt in such a half-hearted fashion so it would be better to never have attempted) it *becomes* impossible by virtue of never having tried!

Henry David Thoreau said, “What old people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can.” I think now we see, “What you told yourself you could not do, you try and find that you can.”

Forget talent. Forget what is possible. Forget what you think you know. Tap into your desire, give it your best effort each day, and find out what you are capable of! You will find, after time, that you will be able to draw better than you ever imagined. It makes me wonder what else in life is possible if I only put aside what I thought and worked with my whole being.



Fear

A lot of people say they are afraid of the blank page. The blank page doesn't scare me, the first mark I make is always right. There is no way it can be wrong. Wrong compared to what? The second mark on the page is where the drawing gets tricky. Then the third mark has to relate to the first two, and so on. What this means is that the process of a drawing is a process where I make mistakes and fix them. If I become afraid of making mistakes, I become unable to proceed further.

A goal of improving your skills would be the improving initial accuracy of what you lay down but even in watching some of the greatest living artists, they make many corrections and adjustments each time they work. Don't be afraid to make a mistake! Don't be afraid to put down a line that may be wrong. In drawing, as in life, the wrong step realized leads to the right step.

I want to make sure to impart the proper context of mistakes and your attitude toward them. You should not be careless. Don't work without paying attention to what you are doing. Don't just keep going without noticing what you are doing or how the drawing is progressing. On the other hand, don't be so careful that you cannot bring yourself to make a mark. Don't let the fear of mistakes paralyze you. Try to find a place in between these extremes; thoughtful yet unafraid.

In the bigger picture, many people are afraid of failure. A failed drawing. A failed art show. A failed art career. In the same way that a missed mark helps you find the correct mark in a drawing, so the "failed" drawing or show, thoughtfully analyzed, shows you the way to a better result the next time. Unless you're the one person in seven billion who can strike the mark on the first attempt, you're going to learn to strike the mark after a series of misses. Every artist you admire, even though they may have a book filled with hundreds of beautiful drawings, will probably never show you the thousands of failed attempts that led up to those drawings. (As an example, I attempted eleven self portraits before I was able to complete the work on the cover. That was the twelfth attempt!)

As your skills grow, your results come closer to your expectations. As your results come closer to your expectations your expectation of what is possible expands. My horrendous failures today would have been considered glorious successes years ago. If you can put the idea of failure out of your mind and always strive to find out what is possible then anything becomes possible (with enough time and work). Each mistake, each failure, is only a step on the road that ultimately leads to where you want to go. Mistakes and failures are such an integral part of successes and accomplishments that there's really nothing to be afraid of at all.

Take risks. Make mistakes. Learn. Try again. Reap the rewards.



Restriction of creativity

I've had a few discussions with some aspiring artists who say they are uninterested in learning any real technical abilities because they are afraid that rigid technical training will stifle their creativity. I understand the argument. However, if the goal of doing visual artwork is to speak, visually, then you've got to know the language to be articulate. There's something charming about the babbling of a baby but I've never heard anything inspiring, thoughtful, profound, or insightful from a baby. I'm not calling people who feel this way babies, I'm only using the analogy of a person who cannot speak the language. There's no real chance for powerful, intentional, articulate communication. At best, we can only infer what the baby is thinking.

Imagine trying to play a musical instrument without ever learning anything about the instrument, or even music! When was the last time you heard a brilliant musician who knew nothing about the instrument they were playing? Who steps onto an athletic field, having rarely played any sports before, and instantly gets accolades all the way up to the top tier of professional sports? Take a person who has never cooked before into a kitchen and ask them to make something from scratch. How great can the meal possibly be?

Again, I am not bringing this up to ridicule people who think this way. I am bringing it up to show that it is a silly idea. The better your grasp of a language, the better your ability to express yourself. Think of it as a language, much like the English I am writing in. The more I understand about the structure of the language, the larger my vocabulary, and the more I am able to think and feel about my experiences, the more powerful and articulate my communication will become. It's twofold, having something to say and then having the technical ability to say it. The better you understand yourself and the tools in front of you, the better you are aware and understanding of life, the better you can show this to others.

Progress

When you are drawing, it is very easy to get into the habit of *thinking* that you know what you are seeing. Without any training, we naturally come to understand the world around us as symbols or details. The Egyptian hieroglyph symbol for an eye is a common type of symbol. Many people start by drawing eyes as symmetrical almonds. We understand hair to be a thousand tiny strands. You will see many portrait drawings in which the person appears to have spaghetti for hair. You understand the symbol for the eye, or the literal detail of the hair, but the idea is to learn to see these things as they appear in front of you.

The natural, busy progression of life does not allow for the slowing down to observe what is actually in front of you. An eye is not a flat symbol like the hieroglyph, and (though it is thousands of strands) hair does not actually look like thousands of strands.

The fundamentals presented in the book, if you take the time to learn them, will help you to observe what is actually in front of you. It is a big hurdle to get past drawing what you *think* is in front of you. The first step is to consciously let go of what you think. When you are practicing, try not to assume anything. Slow down, take many measurements, and really try to compare. You will discover, over time, how an eye does not actually look like the hieroglyph at all.

In my teaching, I have found that the older the student is, the bigger a struggle it is to let go of what you think. The longer we live, the more we get used to seeing the world in a particular way. The sooner you can begin to observe, the easier it will be to break the habits of *thinking* you are observing. I don't say this to discourage any person who is older and wants to learn, just to make you aware so you can properly work towards improving. All students have to let go of what they think they are drawing in order to be able to see.

The biggest hurdle to your own progress, regardless of your age, is yourself. Your own mindset will determine your success. Your own ability to discipline yourself to do what accomplishment requires will determine if you accomplish or not. It will take a short time for you to master the dexterity and the materials. It will take a lifetime to master the coordination of your eye, mind, heart, and hand. You will find, as you progress, that the real struggles happen inside of you.

Ned Mueller said to me recently, "First, the artist draws what they think. Then, the artist draws what they know. Finally, the artist draws what they feel."

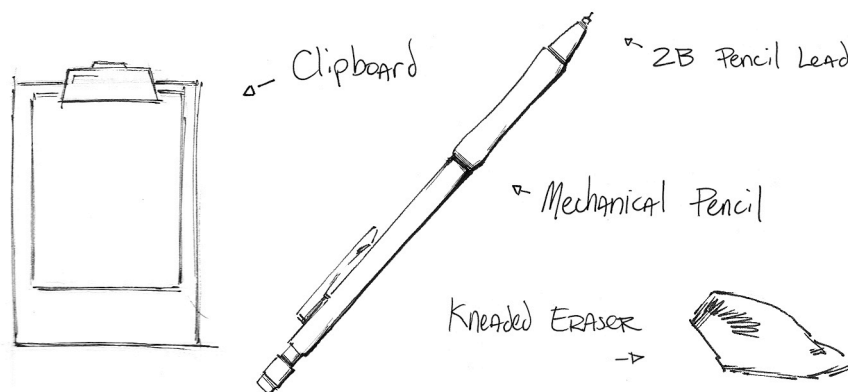


Materials

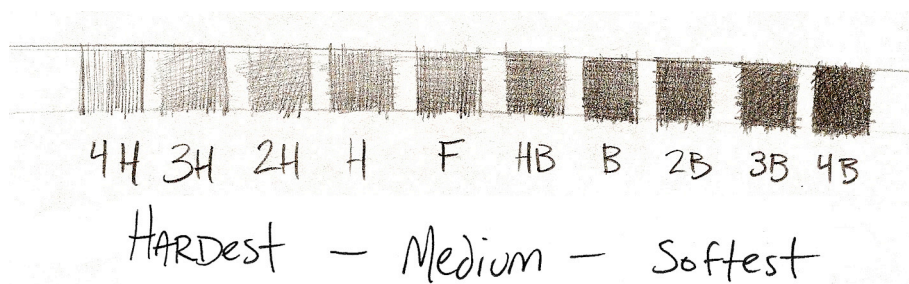
There are a thousand pencils, a thousand papers, and a million ways to put them together for a drawing. Ultimately, you want to use whatever materials will serve your purpose; the pencil is just a tool. The best artists can use any materials because their work is the result of their abilities, not their tools. However, you have to start somewhere, so I'll explain some basic materials to use with the beginner in mind. If you're just starting out, try to stick to the same materials for a period of time so you can get comfortable with them and focus more on developing your abilities. Once you've got a good feel for some basic tools, try some others and see how they work for you.

Graphite

For drawings and sketches I use a clipboard with plain computer paper on it. I use a .7mm mechanical pencil with 2B lead. For a finished drawing I will use some stronger paper; any Bristol or drawing paper of smooth to medium texture. I use a kneaded eraser for all erasing (not the eraser on the pencil).



You will find graphite and charcoal pencils in various types; H, HB, F, and B. These letters and numbers indicate the relative hardness or softness of the lead. Harder lead will go on lighter and require you to press harder to go darker. With harder leads you'll need to take care to avoid scarring the paper (creating a permanent indent in the paper). Softer leads will go on easier and darker.



I prefer to work with only one pencil of the softest lead I can find, if possible. For light lines in the beginning of the drawing I hold the pencil gentle and loose, barely touching it to the paper. As the drawing progresses, I can go as dark as I need to finish up the drawing without fussing about the pencils. The simpler I can keep the materials, the easier it is to carry fewer materials anywhere, the more prepared I am to do a serious drawing at any time. For me, it's really more about the mentality of keeping it very simple and direct, than a technical issue of using many pencils. I want to make it as easy on myself as possible, so I use as few pencils as possible (almost always, only one). To start with, any pencil with a medium lead and any paper with a smooth texture will do.

Paper

This is just a quick note about the paper. I'd recommend sticking with something that has a fairly smooth texture. As you become comfortable then you can experiment. As I mentioned for drawing with graphite, I use plain computer paper. For more developed drawings, I use a thicker paper. The thicker paper will hold up better for more rendering and erasing. For drawing with charcoal, I use smooth newsprint for sketches and vellum for more developed drawings. I am also experimenting with some thicker, almost cloth-like paper, with a rougher texture, but none of the drawings in this book are on that paper.

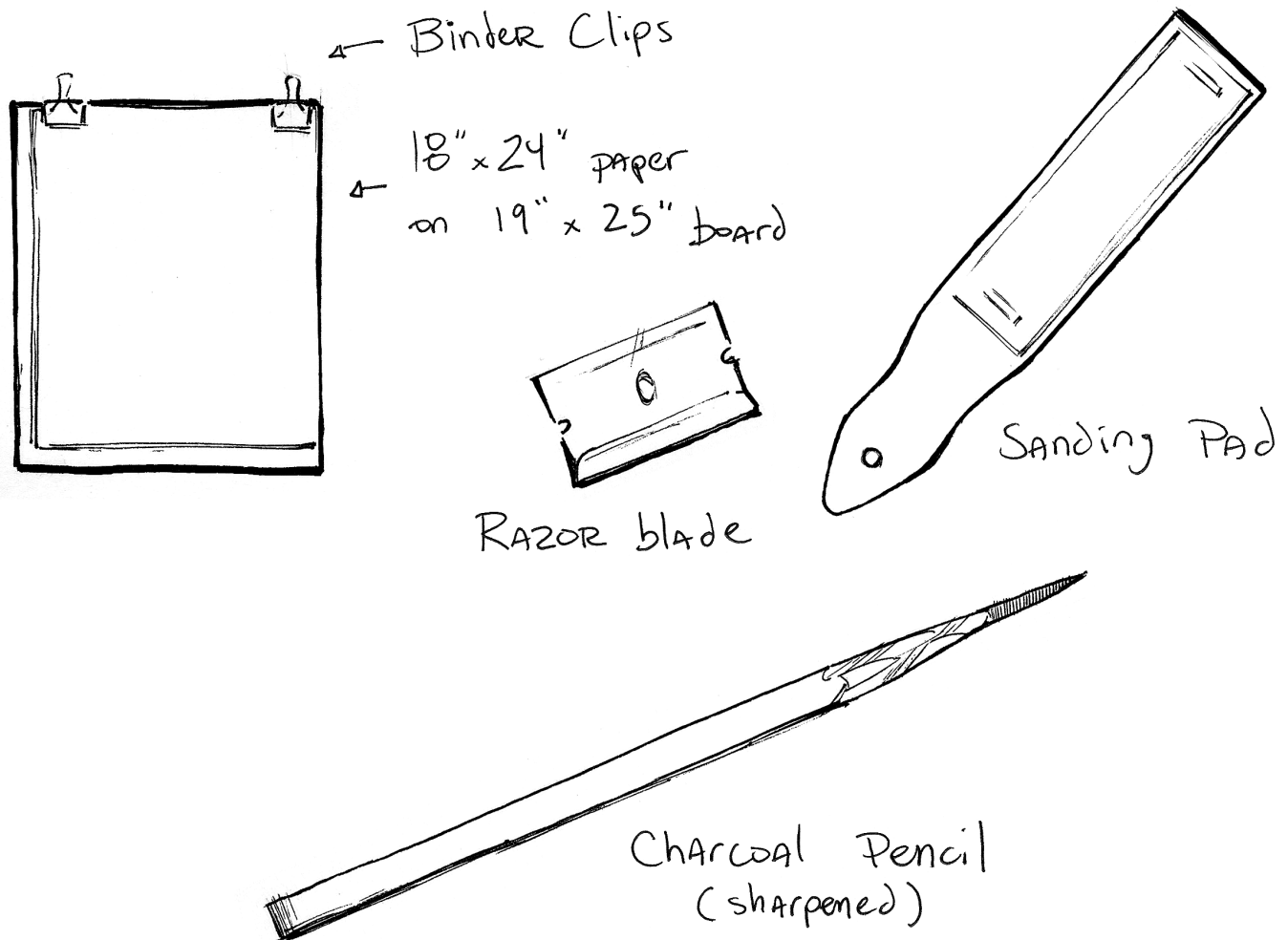
It is important when you are drawing to have some paper behind the paper you are drawing on; around 10 sheets or so. I never draw on a piece of paper just by itself on the drawing board or clipboard. Without some cushion behind the piece you are drawing on it becomes harder to work the pencil into the paper smoothly. You might also pick up some of the grooves from the board. Be sure to keep 10 sheets or so behind whatever you are working on. If you've only got one fancy piece of paper you're doing a finished drawing on, put sheets of a cheaper paper (computer paper, newsprint) below it to give you that cushion.

Charcoal

When I draw with charcoal I typically work larger than in graphite. The charcoal pencils allow me to make a much bigger mark so I can go to a bigger scale without much concern. The scale that you work at should, to some degree, align with the scale of the tools you're using. For bigger drawings you need a tool that will make a bigger mark.

I have a large drawing board (it's about 19"x25") made out of lightweight wood (I've seen them available for purchase at art stores) that I clip paper to with binder clips. For sketches, I use 18"x24" smooth newsprint. For longer drawings I use vellum, and for bigger drawings I use any combination that will suit a bigger board. The newsprint is an easy surface to control the charcoal pencils on and it is cheap. I still use a kneaded eraser for all erasing.

The only pencil I really use is a General's charcoal pencil. There are many other fine charcoal pencils out there, you don't have to use the General's, but I am a simple man. It works for what I am attempting to do right now so I use it. Most of my experimentation is with methods, procedures, and principles, I don't fool around with materials all that much. I prefer to use the 6B pencil. I use a razor blade to carve some wood away and then a sanding pad to sharpen the end of the pencil to a smooth, tapering point. It is an extra effort to sharpen the point like this and it takes some practice (and a few broken pencils) to get comfortable carving down the pencil like this but it is worth it. The payoff is that you can use the very tip of the pencil to get a thin, sharp line and the flat side to get a broad, soft line.



I could go into depth, with sketches or photos, on how to sharpen the pencil but it seemed better worth the effort to make a video to put on youtube.com so you could see it happen in real time. Please visit my youtube.com channel and click the video titled "How to sharpen the charcoal pencil".

<http://www.youtube.com/michaelneverstops>



Fundamentals

What follows is the fundamentals. What I mean by fundamentals is that they are universal ideas to be understood. As an example, when you make a mark on paper with a pencil, it already has an edge; hard or soft. It already has a value; how light or dark it is. It already has a shape. You've already measured the stroke; how long or short, in what direction. And so on. Any drawing will automatically have areas of light and dark so it is key to understand how the light and dark are going to work together and with other fundamentals, in order to put together the kind of drawing you want.

Please keep in mind as you go through the chapters that I am putting forth the best, most essential information as I use it. There is certainly more, possibly better, information out there. This is the information that I consider to be key and once you grasp it I would encourage you to go study and learn from others.



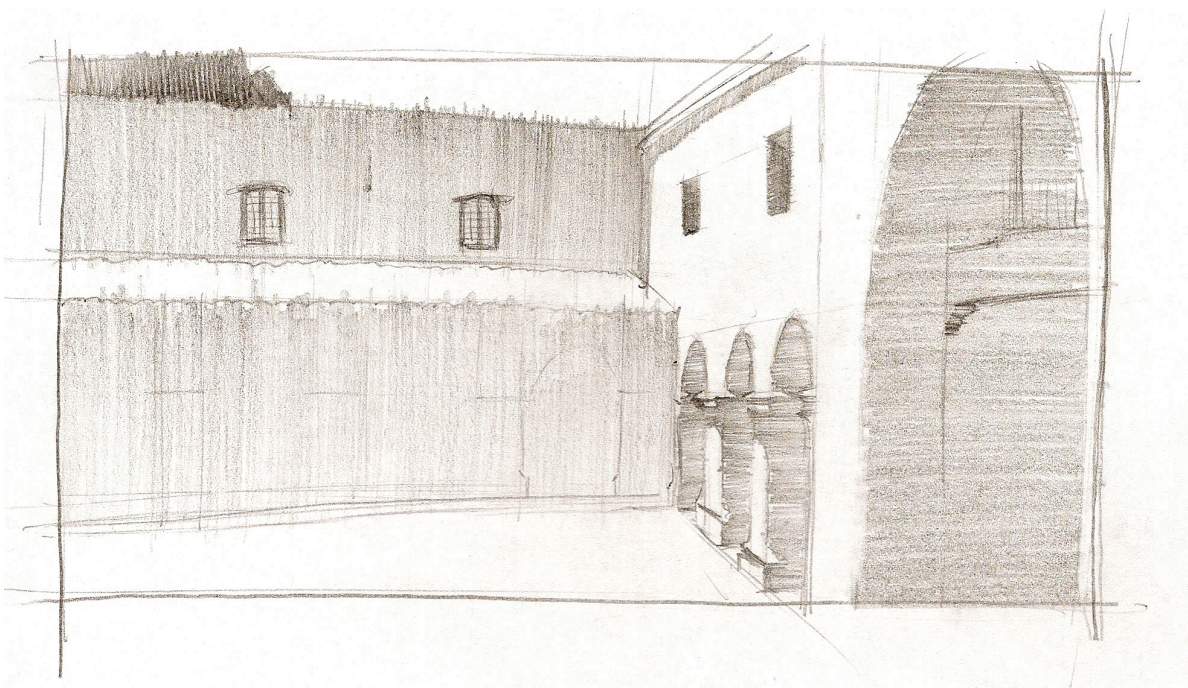
Measuring

Measuring is vital. It is so important because whether you realize it or not, you are always measuring. The better you can measure the better your drawings will get.

In drawing, you're solving visual problems as you build up to the finish. Visual measuring is one of the tools at your disposal in the same way actual measuring works for a carpenter. Imagine building a house without being able to measure any of the beams or parts you're putting together, or even the whole space you're trying to put them in. It is the same way with the artist who doesn't visually measure.

There are two ways to visually measure that play off of one another. You'll need them both, neither is extremely effective without the other; they work together. If you had a baseball and wanted to figure out how to hit a target, you would need to know what direction to aim and how far to throw the baseball to hit the target. It's the same with drawing. Measuring helps you get the lines in the right direction and the right distance in relation to each other.

Measuring is not conditional upon scale. These techniques will work if you're drawing is one inch or one hundred inches. The idea of measuring is to get the things you are comparing in relation to one another. You don't have to be drawing at life size to do this, the idea is to make a visual comparison and then make sure the relationships you observe in life are the same as the relationships in the drawing. It's similar to how we look at a map. You can see a map on a cellphone, fold out brochure, or projected on the side of a building and, so long as the map is in scale, it will always show the same relative distances. Visual measuring allows us to maintain the same relation between how things appear in life and how we draw them.



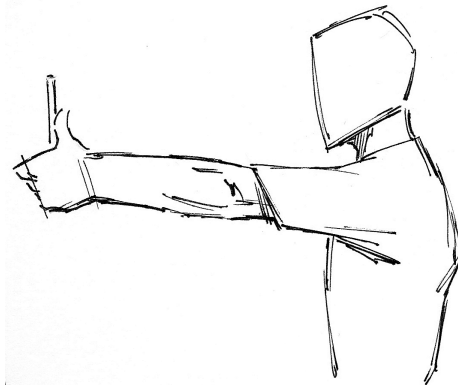
Comparative Measuring

The essence of comparative measuring is visually comparing one distance with another. We understand the distance of a “foot” because we understand the distance of an “inch”. The smaller distance helps us to comprehend the larger distance. A foot is twelve inches. It will help you to understand larger distances by first understanding a shorter distance. It doesn’t work well in reverse. It is hard to comprehend an inch by thinking of $1/12^{\text{th}}$ of a foot. The trick with comparative measuring is that you do not have an already accepted value, an inch, with which to begin measuring. We have to find the value first then make the comparison. You will always start with what appears to be the smallest measurement first.

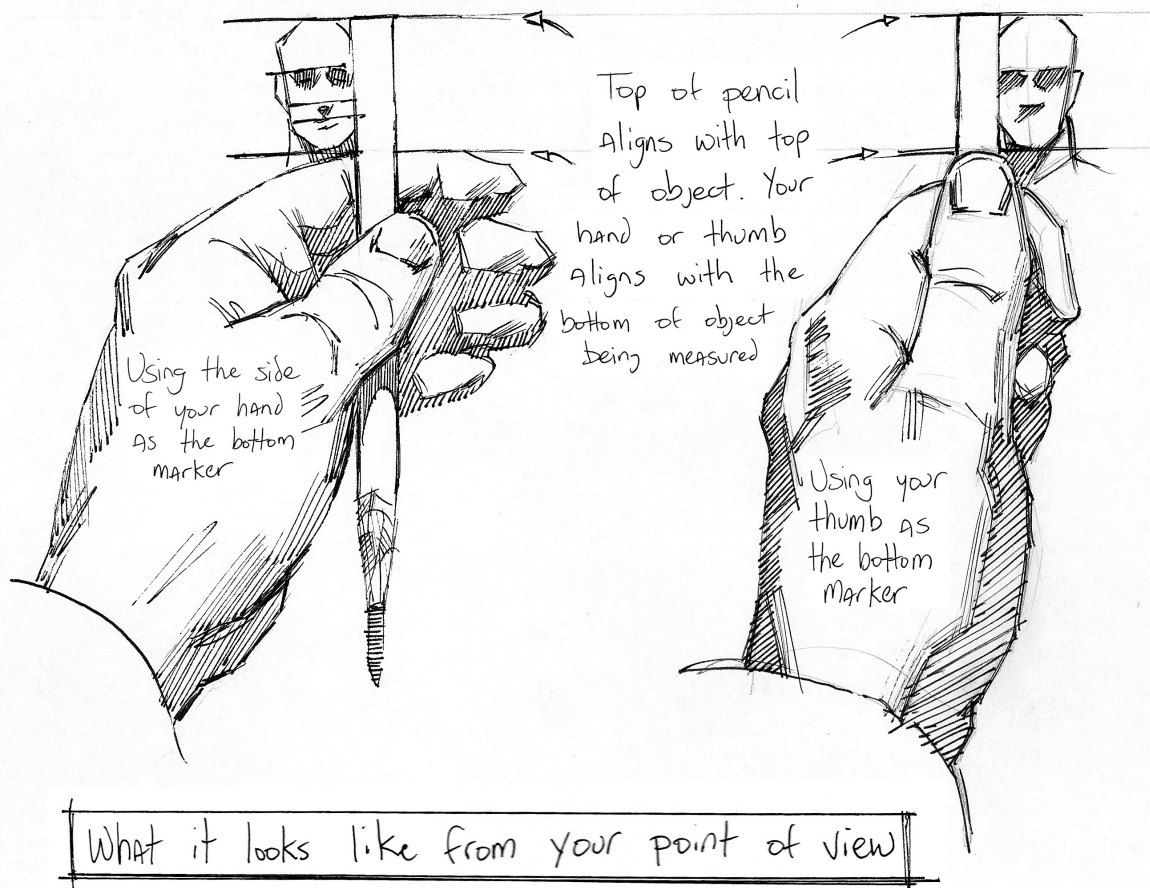
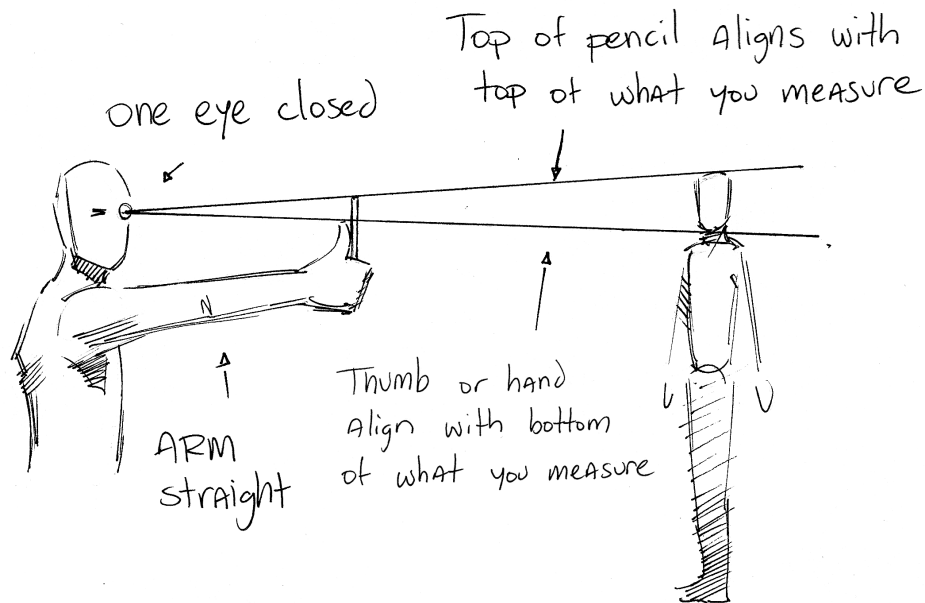
Let’s say you are drawing a person. The way this idea applies in making sure that the drawing looks like the person in front of you is in getting the measuring correct. The person’s head is a certain size and in a certain relationship to the body (just like the facial features are a certain size or relation to the head, and the person themselves is a certain relation to the environment they are in). Since the head is smaller than the body, we would find out how big the head is then measure how many “heads” tall or wide the rest of the person is. We’re taking a small measurement and then measuring something larger with it. If you take that measurement of the head first, then you just extrapolate that across the larger distance (the whole person). In the same way you can have an inch and then count how many inches tall somebody is.

How to measure

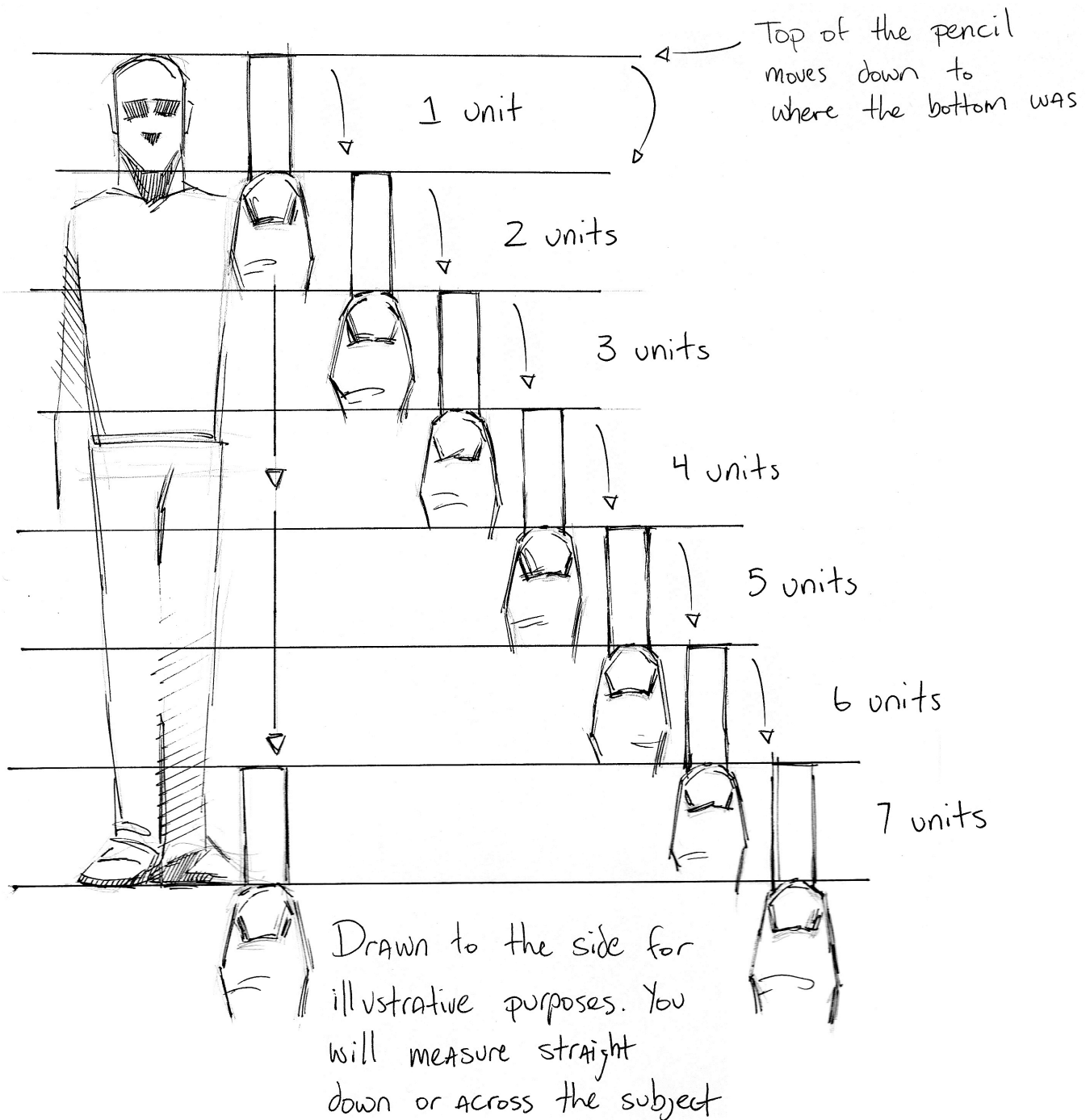
1- The only tool you need to help you make these comparisons is your pencil. Hold your pencil with the point downward and your arm straight out in front of you. It is essential that you keep your arm straight (elbow locked) as you measure. This keeps the pencil the same distance from your eye as you take various measurements. You have to keep the pencil the same distance from your eye in order to have any accuracy in your measurements. Your measurements will only be accurate if you are in the same spot. If you move, you have to re-measure.



2- Align the top of your pencil with the end of what you are going to use as your first measurement. Then you can use your thumb or the flat of your hand, pressed against your pencil, to mark the bottom of the object that you want to measure. Close one eye as you're lining these things up, same as when you aim a gun. (In the below example, we're going to measure a person's head) The distance that you end up with is your unit.

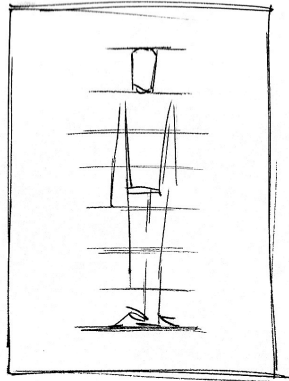


3- Now you've got your first measurement. You can compare the head to the body by projecting this measurement down the body. Start with your pencil top at one end of the measurement (in this example, we'll start at the top of the person) and then move the top of the pencil down to where the bottom of the measurement is. Now you've gone two lengths of the measurement (in this case, two 'heads' down the figure). Continue moving the measurement across the object, counting how many units it takes to get to the end. (In the example below, you'll see we discover that the person is seven 'heads' tall) There is the relationship! If you want to draw this person, to look like they do, then you've got to maintain the relationship of the whole person being seven 'heads' tall.

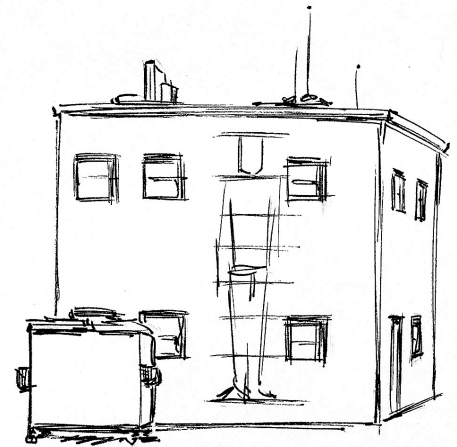


On the previous illustration, I drew the pencil out to the side for the clarity of the illustration, to show how you continually move your pencil downward. When you actually measure, you'd just run your pencil along whatever you're measuring (following the dotted line). In the example we discover the person is seven "heads" tall. Now we have something to start creating a structure in the drawing (or something to check and see if the work you've done this far is accurate).

project
7 "heads"
to fit on
the paper



...or the side
of a building
for a mural.
scale doesn't
matter.

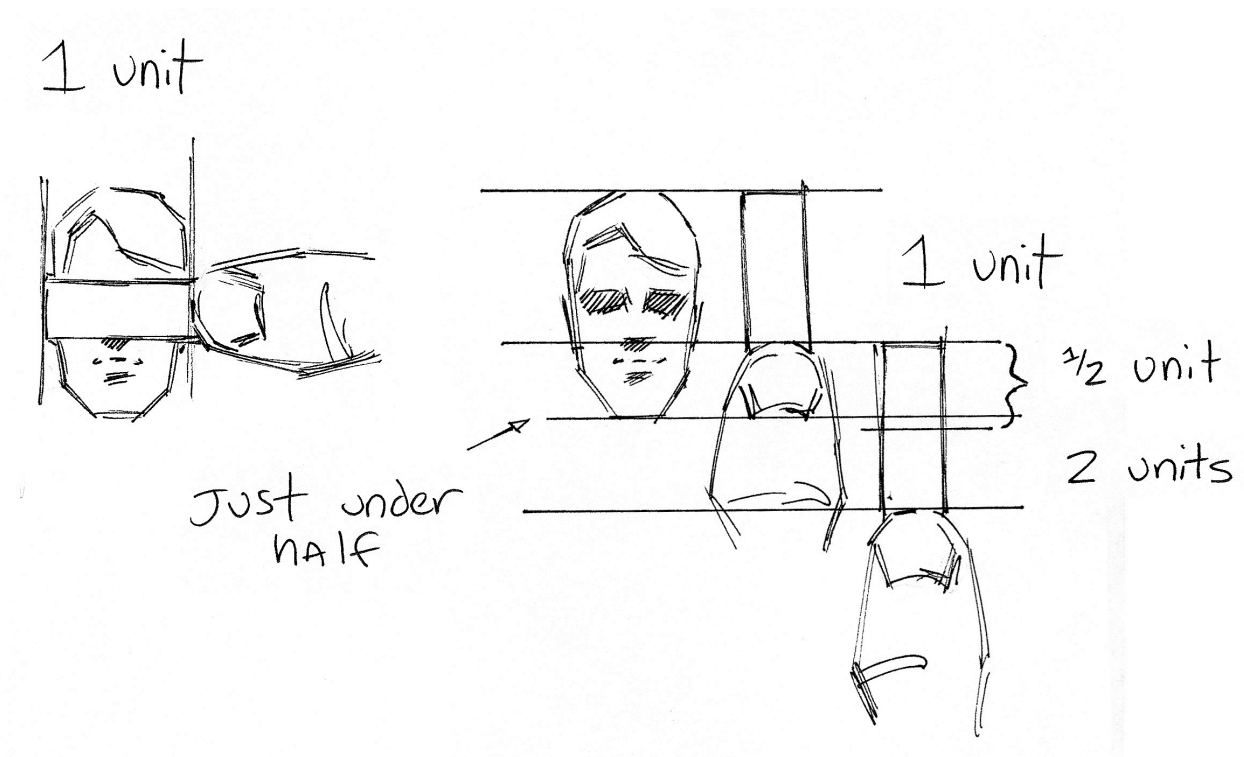


This concept is applied universally. Once you have that relationship you can lay it out on your paper, if you're at the start of the drawing, or you can measure what you have already drawn to see if it is correct.

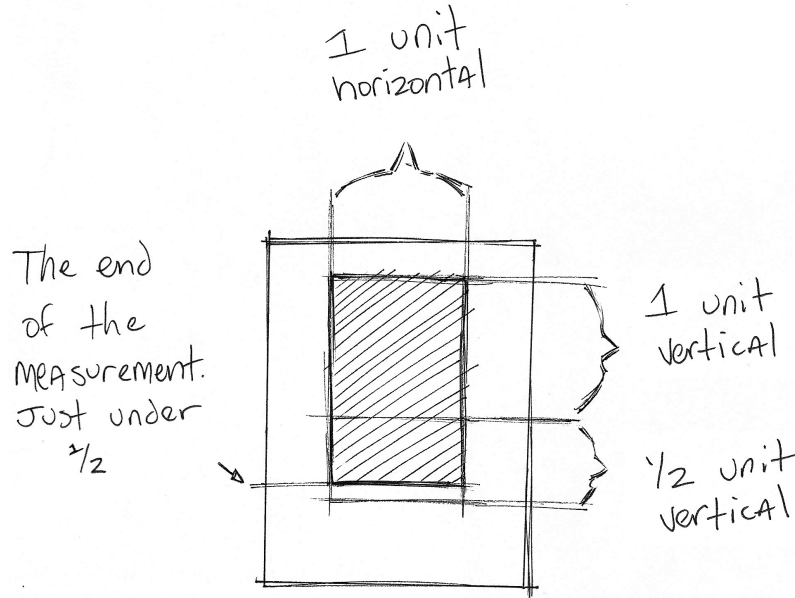
It is easier to measure shorter distances. I find it helpful to place a few large measurements for scale and space and then to try to lock down some close measurements. Many artists work from large to small measurements but I have always had a hard time working strictly within this method. If you start to struggle with the accuracy of large measurements, look for shorter ones.

Comparative measuring isn't only used to project out a distance. You can also use it to find a ratio of how wide an object is to how tall it is. In the example below, if you were drawing a portrait, you may want to start by finding out how wide the person's head is compared with how tall it is. This will give you a parameter with which to start with (and if you measure like this later in the drawing, it's a great way to check to see that your drawing is coming out accurately).

In this example I started measuring the head with the shortest side first; the width. Then I compared that to the height and found that the head was just under one and a half times as tall as it was wide. Now when I start laying in the drawing on the paper, I can map out an area that is “1 unit” by just under “1 and a half units”. It’s nice when the measurements work out to be exactly even, such as 1x2, but sometimes they don’t always work out exactly. I think it’s important to keep it simple. You don’t want to get into all kinds of complicated fractions, like $\frac{17}{50}$ ths, just make it as simple, but accurate, as you can. $\frac{2}{5}$ ^{ths}, $\frac{1}{3}$ rd, and $\frac{1}{4}$ th, are all fine, but I don’t get much more complicated than that. You’re never tied to a measurement, you can always change it, but the more accurately you can start the less you’ll have to change later.



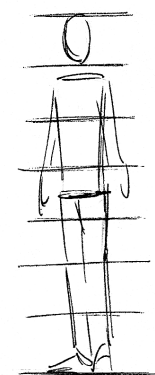
For this example, I’ve ended with a measurement of $1 \times < 1.5$, or, as I think about it mentally, “one by just under one and a half”. Once I begin the drawing, I’ll create a space with those dimensions on the paper to begin with.



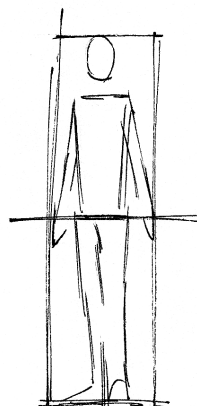
You can see in the above example how I have the whole space of my paper and I mark out an area with my ratio on it. I do it freehand, measuring with my fingers. The shaded area inside is the area I have marked out. Now I've got an area squared off on the paper that should be the same size as what I am about to draw. It's an essential part of accuracy and breaking the problem down so you have a way to proceed toward a successful finish. It might seem foreign at first but as you measure more and more it will become second nature and your eye will become attuned.

It also can be helpful to measure the ratios in the middle of the drawing. At any time, if things start to look like they're going south don't be afraid to take another measurement and compare it to what you already have down on the paper. There's not a specific time or place to use comparative measuring. Once you understand the principle, you can apply it at any time that is necessary. So long as you are steadily progressing toward the finish, you cannot measure too much.

Lastly, sometimes I will measure off of the object and sometimes I measure off of the frame. Measuring off of the object is where I take a measurement that relates to the actual object (ex: measuring the width of the nose, then how many noses wide is the face). Measuring off of the frame is where you measure off of the entire box of what you are drawing. When you take that initial ratio (the whole outside box), that is the frame. You can then take measurements off of that to help you place things in the drawing. You can cut the box in half horizontally, or vertically (find a measurement that goes across the distance exactly twice, the intersection of the two halves is the halfway point), and see what parts of the object line up with those parts of the box. Ex: if you cut your drawing in half horizontally, you may find that it lines up exactly with the nose. Now you can indicate the nose halfway down the frame, and it will be in the same spot in your drawing as it is relative to the whole.



Measuring "heads"
off of the object



Measuring to cut the
frame in half, vertically.

Above, you can see an example of each. On the left, I've measured off of the object. I found a head measurement and projected it across the figure. On the right I measured off of the frame, cutting it in half and finding the shirt line is exactly half way. One is not more superior then the other. Use both!

Relative Measuring

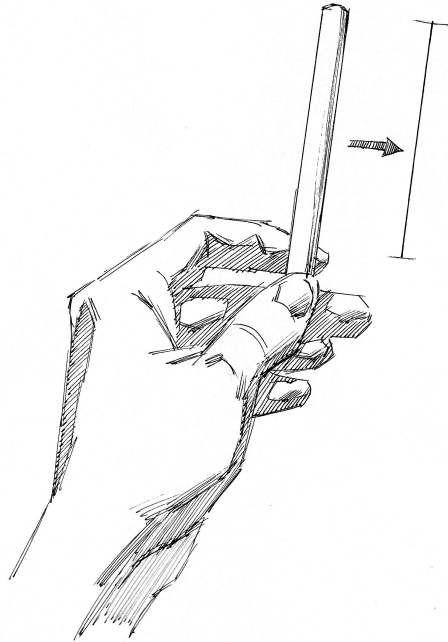
Relative measuring works in tandem with comparative measuring. It's a little simpler to understand and apply but equally vital to the success of the drawing.

Have you ever seen the old masters drawings with the grids? Imagine vertical and horizontal lines across your subject. Relative measuring is the same thing only using your pencil and your eyes instead of relying on a grid. The basic concept of relative measuring is to find out what parts in a drawing are aligned (or relative to each other). Remember that as you practice with accuracy in mind, the faster and more accurate you'll become over time.

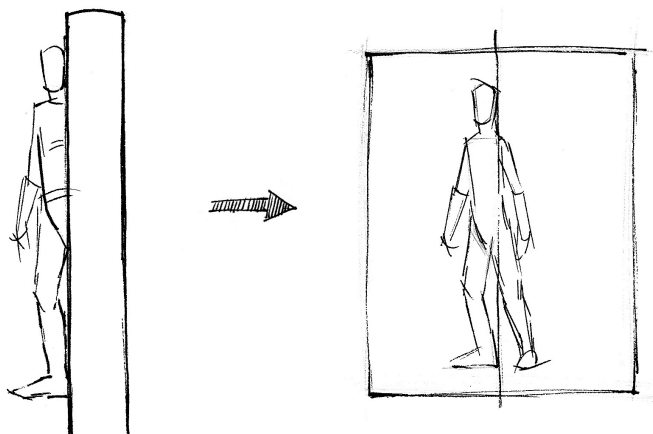
It is easy to look at what you are drawing and think that you can see exactly what it is you are drawing but by taking the time to accurately measure, you can ensure that you are actually seeing what is in front of you. It will take some practice to help yourself see properly. The principle and execution is very straightforward.

How to measure

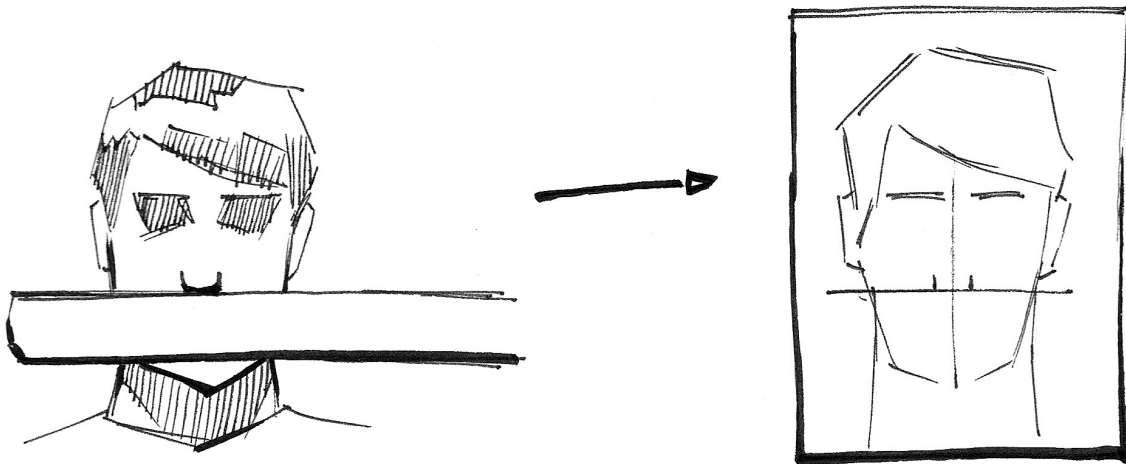
- 1- You will use the side of your pencil as a straight edge. Hold your pencil up in front of yourself so you can see a straight edge of the pencil unobstructed. You do not have to keep your arm straight, as in comparative measuring, but you want to keep the pencil a decent length out in front of you. With relative measuring it's important for you to see a straight edge of the pencil, not that the pencil is kept at a certain distance.



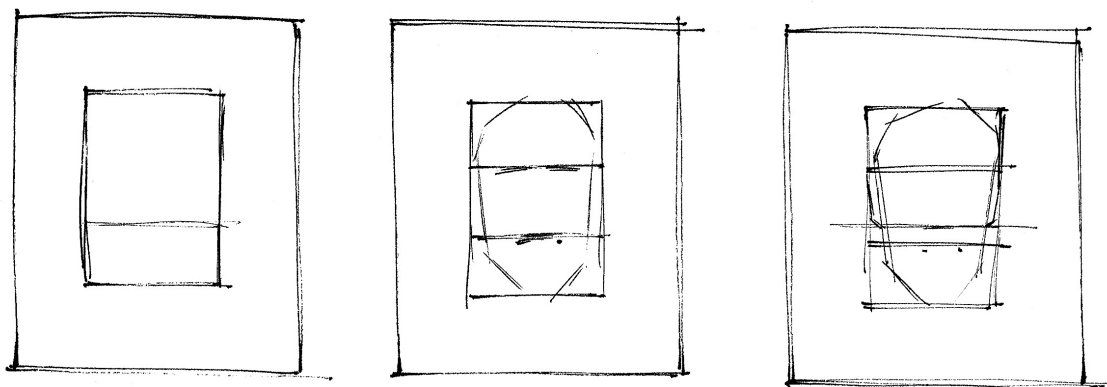
- 2- Align the pencil with the edges of the objects you are going to measure. Using the straight edge, you can see what things align horizontally, vertically, or any other direction you might want to find. Then you make sure the alignment is the same in the drawing. In the below example if I align the pencil vertically with the side of the head, straight downward, I can see that it aligns with side of the foot. Then I just have to make sure that the relationship stays the same in the drawing.



You will run into situations where things do not line up exactly. What to do? The situation isn't ideal, but I will make a visual comparative measurement. In the below example, I've taken a horizontal measurement across the bottom of the nose to see where the ears line up with the nose. Turns out, the ears don't line up exactly with the bottom of the nose. If I can't find a better way to accurately see what the ears line up with, I'll try to make sure that the relative distance is the same in the drawing as it is in the measurement.



These two ways of measuring work off of each other to help you piece together the visual puzzle. Comparative measuring can help you keep distances in relation and relative measuring can keep things in actual line with each other. You can find the directions and then the distances or vice versa. Below are a few applications, as if you were starting a portrait drawing.



First, a comparative measurement finds the ratio

A comparative measurement off of the frame divides the drawing into thirds. You find the thirds line up with the eyebrows and the mouth.

Then a relative measurement across the nose (once you place the nose) gives you the placement of the ears.

Now you know how to measure a specific distance, ratio, and how to make sure various elements in a drawing stay in alignment with each other. Hopefully you can see how these two ways of measuring work together and have endless applications. You will use them to help you build up the drawing and then use them to help you refine the drawing as you go along. With comparative measuring you can take anything and compare it to anything else (across a distance or in a ratio). Try it!

When you're out and about, compare as much as you can. Compare a car to a building. Compare a person to a tree. With relative measuring, you can always be making sure that things are in alignment. Practice as much as possible! You'll start to see people's noses are crooked, eyes don't align, many asymmetries in faces, and all kinds of unexpected results. There is no real rule for when and where in a drawing to use it, so just go for it! You'll learn over time when it is best. You'll start to get a feel for it but you won't be able to develop that feeling until you use it often, over a long period of time.





Simplification and Design

This is the most difficult of the fundamentals to explain, even nail down, but it is vital. It seems obvious that you'd be unable to draw every blade of grass in a field, every leaf on a tree, or every hair on a person's head. A few artists have tried with sadly overworked results. The reason so much detail looks overworked (and unpleasant) is because the eye doesn't see like that. Your eye sees the detail of exactly what you're looking if you completely focus on one spot but in a general sense, you see in terms of masses and forms. Details also disappear as your vision fades away from your center of focus. Whatever you see on your peripheral vision is much less detailed than what you are focusing on. Artists use this in artworks to powerful effect. You can lead the eye toward of a focus with the limiting of detail.

These ideas of simplifying and design don't have hard concrete rules. The best way to learn these ideas is from an artist whose work you like. I learned from artists I took classes from (who drew on top of my drawings in the class) and from doing copies of drawings from artists that I like. For the sake of learning, there's no shame in copying somebody else's drawings. It's a powerful way to learn and one that has been employed for hundreds of years. It's trying to pass off another artist's work as your own that is evil.

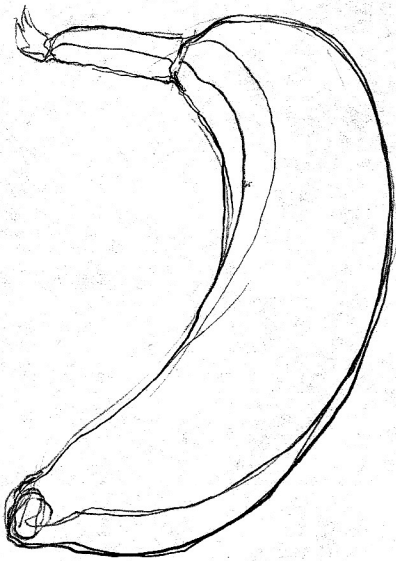
When you copy another artists drawing you're getting a view of the way they would solve a problem. You'll take away the knowledge of how another artist worked, giving you a base to develop your own way to work. It is similar to riding a bike with training wheels. Once you've done some copies, you'll have some of that understanding yourself and then you will have a place to start when you get to solving your own problems. The only thing to be wary of is that you don't let the copying take over what you are capable of. Use it as a tool to learn. Don't become reliant on making copies of another artist's work, or even attempting to become a copy of another artist's style. The knowledge gained from copying is invaluable so long as you use it as a place to start and move beyond it.

Aside from copying and studying with another artist, I'll try and lay out a few of the basic principles that should help guide you to growing your own skills through practice.

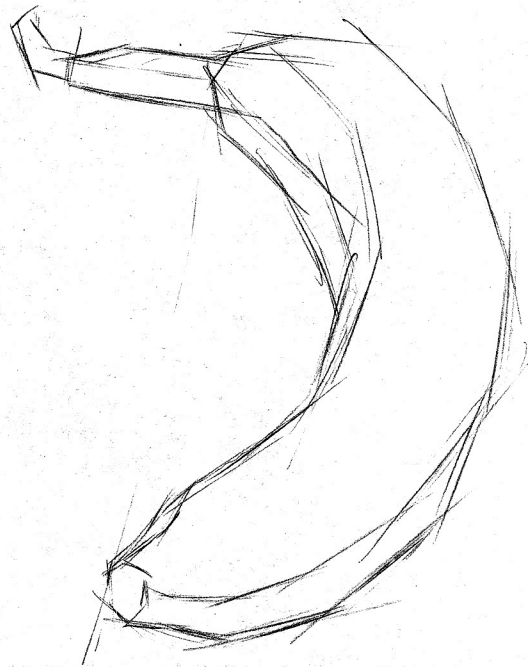
Straight Lines

Start with straight lines (and then use them as much as you can throughout the drawing). Almost everything in the natural world has some sort of curve to it, especially living things, but it is very difficult to get these curves right the first time and then use those for further measuring. Also, straight lines build up a structural look to the thing you are drawing, whereas it's much more difficult to draw the right curved lines with a convincing structure. Straight lines will give the drawing structure and make it easier for you to measure.

Below I will demonstrate how to start the drawing with just straight lines and also how to start with straight lines and build up the curves. Of course, at any time you could just hammer in the curved line if you feel you are capable, there's no one way to go about it. One thing to keep in mind is how to vary the straight and curved lines in the drawing. You can really show the straightness of a surface by having lots of curves around it, or vice versa. A big part of the artistic choice of design is where to keep things straight and where to put in the curves.

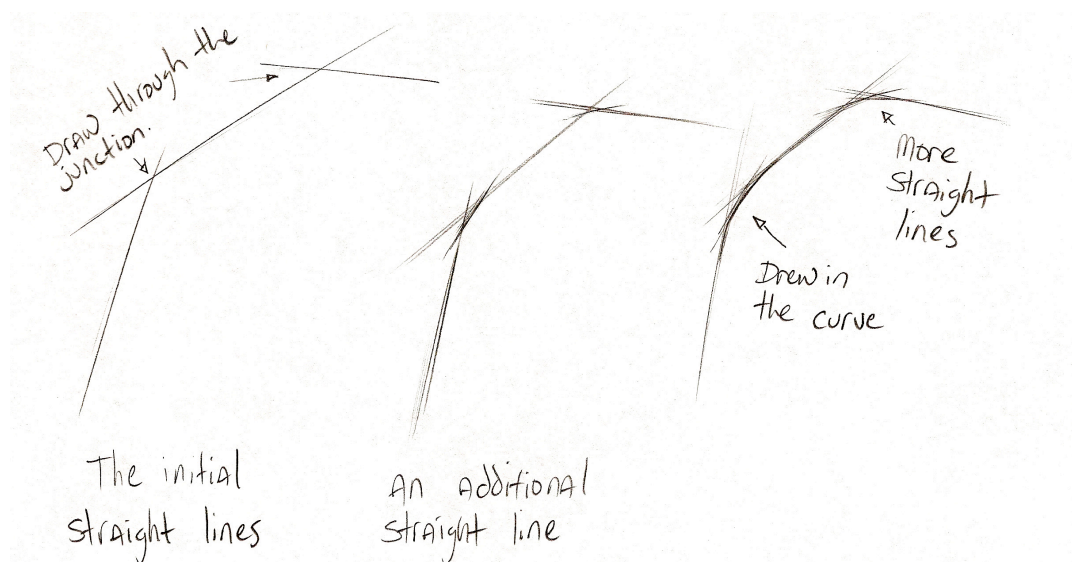


The actual curves
of the banana

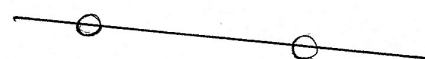


The banana drawn
with straight lines

In the following example, I'll show how to start with big straight lines and continue to put smaller straight lines in to build up a curve.



Keep your hand loose. Try to draw with your whole arm (especially for any bigger strokes). As you see in the previous example, draw through the junction. What this means is to keep the line going past where you want it to stop. You can always erase the trailing part of the line later but by going through you'll end up with a straight line through where you want to go. It's very difficult to stop a line right on the point where you want it to stop, it's much easier to draw past the point. Don't bother with trying to stop it there just draw through.



you want a line
that ends at
specific points

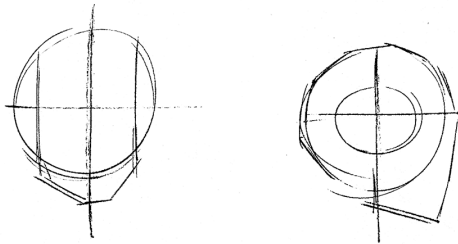
Attempting to draw
straight to the
points is hard.

Draw through where
you want the lines
to end

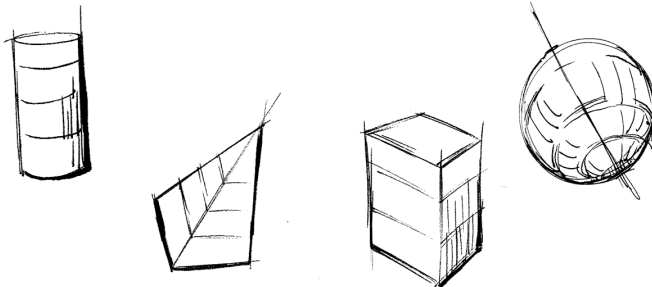
Don't try to be exact but draw through where you are targeting with your line. You can relax and focus on getting that straight line without the pressure of the exact distance every time (also, it is a nice aesthetic). As the drawing progresses you'll specify the exact distance, curvature, and shape of the forms you are sculpting. In the beginning, keep it straight, rough, and light. Think as if you are sculpting.

Basic Shapes

Another very crucial part of simplifying is to think about the basic three-dimensional shapes of an object. It is particularly helpful at the beginning of the drawing. The general idea is to try to think of objects as basic shapes. A fancy table might be some sort of rectangle. A person's head might be a sphere with a cylinder on the front. A leg or arm is some sort of cylinder or rectangle. By thinking of the problem as a basic three-dimensional shape, you are able to more accurately measure and get a basic framework down.



Simple shapes in the style of Loomis to form a basic head shape.



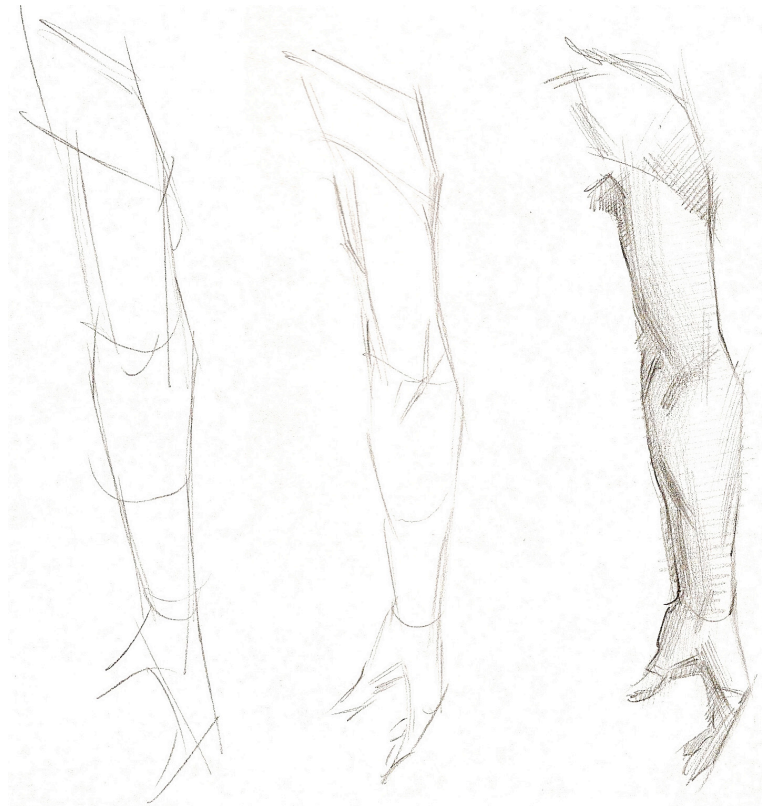
How can you break down what you are seeing into these basic shapes?



A tree as several cones



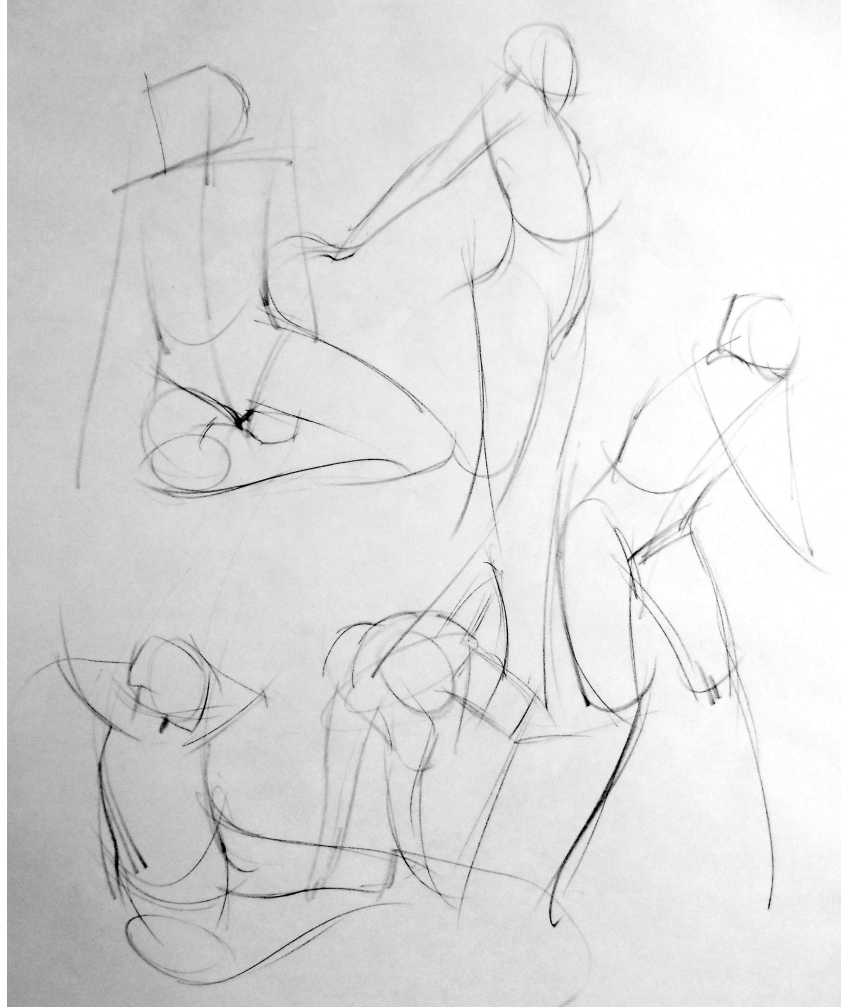
The figure, broken down into a series of cylinders and boxes



An example of how
basic shapes lead
to a solid finish

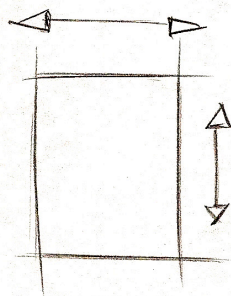
This does several beneficial things for you. It is difficult to account for all the relationships in a drawing and this simplifies the complexity into something easy to understand. It also gives you a framework to build upon. In the same way you would build a house; you wouldn't build the kitchen island and cabinets without first measuring and building up the structure of the house around it. You would have the whole house laid out before you got into the various details of each room. Think about your drawing in the same way. Look for the basic shapes and forget the details. I learned a lot about breaking down the basic shapes from studying George B. Bridgman, Andrew Loomis, and Charles Bargue. Short pose figure drawing sessions are also great to practice these ideas.

When I look at great drawings and paintings from master artists I admire, I have discovered that they don't really have any fancy tricks or shortcuts. The one thing the great artists do exceptionally is nail the fundamentals. They keep it simple, direct, and powerful. Keep it simple! Forget the details.

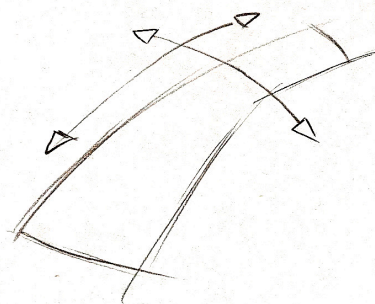


Line Direction

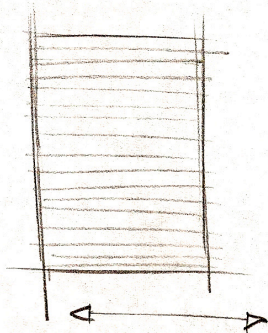
When you get to the point of shading the drawing it's important to be intentional with the direction of the marks you make. I notice a lot of beginners will make marks in no particular direction whatever, which serves to break down the forms of the drawing. It makes the surface look like mush. The direction of the marks that you make will suggest a plane, or surface direction. If you can enhance this it will enhance the dimensional quality of the drawing.



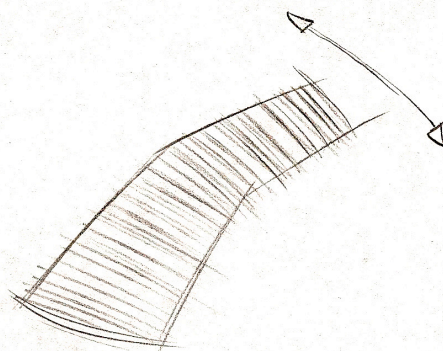
A SQUARE suggests
A form going in one
of two directions



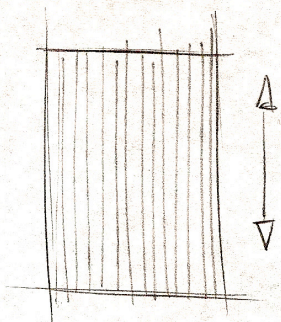
EVEN A BIZARRE shape
has the suggestion
of a form



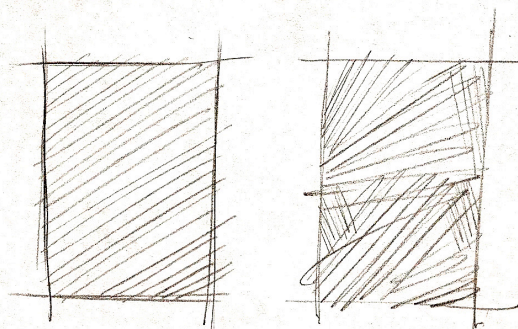
SHADING in A direction
with the form reinforces
the dimension



EVEN the BIZARRE shape
HAS dimension with
intentional lines

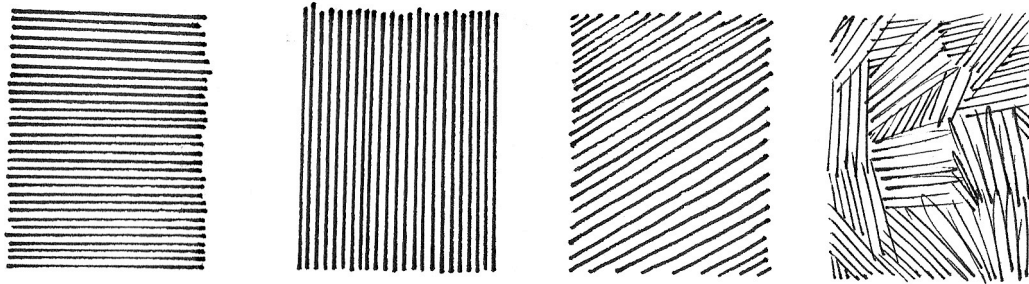


SHADING the other way
still reinforces the form



Haphazard shading ruins
the dimension

You can see in the previous examples how the form is more readily understood when you make your marks in direction with the dimension of the form. Below, I've drawn the shapes again, this time without the borders to further illustrate the point. It's not that you can't figure out that it's a rectangle by staring at it for a moment, but the first two are read much quicker and easier. The issue is that everything you draw has three dimensional form. The whole form is built up of many planes. If you don't make these planes easily viewable and understood then the forms break down.

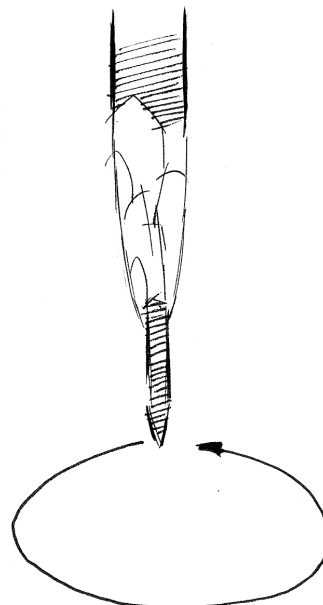


It's also important to note that when shading, you may not leave big gaps in between the marks like that. I'm exaggerating for illustrative purposes; so you can be sure to see the direction of the lines.

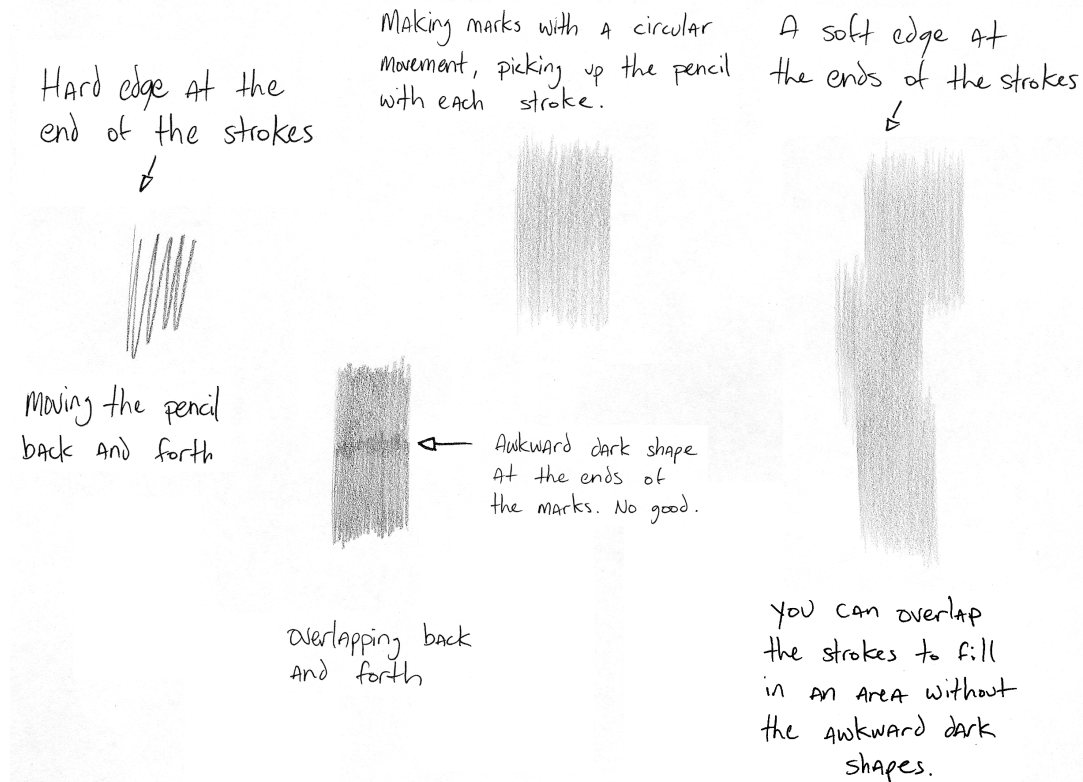
Another technical note: while you're shading don't move your pencil back and forth. Shade with the strokes in a single direction and move your hand in a circular motion, attempting to make strokes with no beginning or end.

A side view

When you want to
fill in an area,
make a circular
motion with the pencil

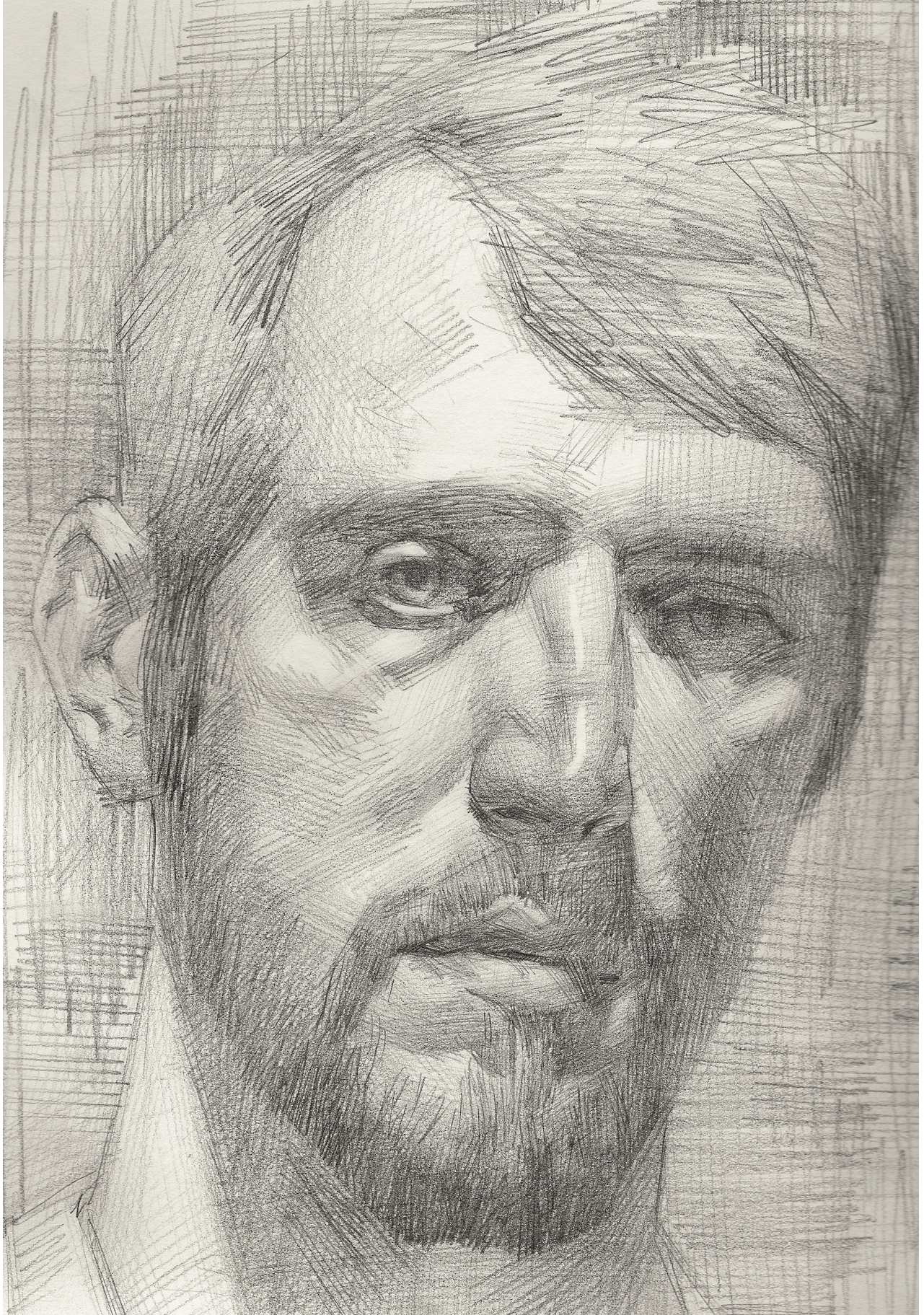


Check out my youtube.com video called "Mark making".



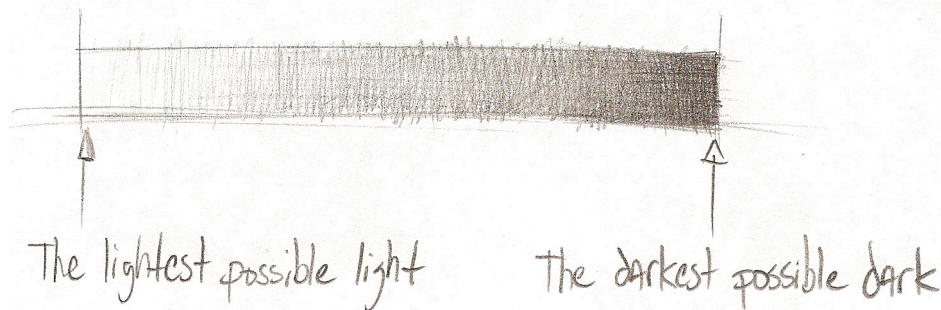
You can see in the example on the left, just moving your pencil back and forth on the paper creates a hard edge. When merged with other tones or even to create a flat tone, the hard edges can create random dark shapes that break down the form of the drawing. On the right side, the marks have softer edges on the end, so you can create flatter tones and merge them together. There's no one way or particular time to use these in the drawing, you'll want to use each one when the situation is right. Just be aware as to whether you want the harder edge or a softer edge. I notice a lot of beginners are rather careless about how they are making the marks but you really enhance or deflate the drawing depending on how you make them. Try to put them together in a way that helps to say what you want to say in the drawing. You can see in the drawing on the following page how I've used the lines in some places with a soft edge so you cannot really see where they begin and end. In other places, I used a hard edge on the end of the lines because it seemed more appropriate. The variety gives the drawing interest. The direction of the way I've shaded reinforces the planes of the face.

A great place to look for reference of line direction is to some artists who have done amazing work in ink. In the medium of ink, you can end up with flat shades of black quickly, so artists use lines to show dimension. Two artists I have gotten huge inspiration and knowledge from are Frank Frazetta and Joseph Clement Coll. Remember, real growth takes time. You might not see the result right away. The more you practice with purpose the stronger your skills will develop over time!



Values

Values are the lights and darks in a drawing. The value of a thing refers to how light or dark an object is. The tricky part of values is that the world is in color and drawings are in black and white. On your drawing, the light of the paper (or on toned paper, a white pencil) is the lightest possible value. As dark as your pencil or charcoal is able to go is the darkest possible value.



There are two important things to learn about values. First, you have to simplify them. Second, it's all about the relationship of the values next to each other. I will discuss different behaviors of light at the end of the procedure section. The best way that I have found to organize the values is through using the procedure. You will also need to be making constant comparisons as the drawing progresses. You'll see later how the procedure is designed, in part, to help you manage the values as you go along. The way you'll learn these principles is to read, understand, and attempt to apply as you practice.

Everything has a "local value". The local value is the inherent light or darkness of the object regardless of the lighting. Value can change for many reasons, one of the foremost being whether or not something is being lit, however, certain things are automatically lighter or darker. If we had two people standing under identical lighting, one with blonde hair and one with brown hair, the blonde hair is intrinsically lighter. It has a lighter local value.

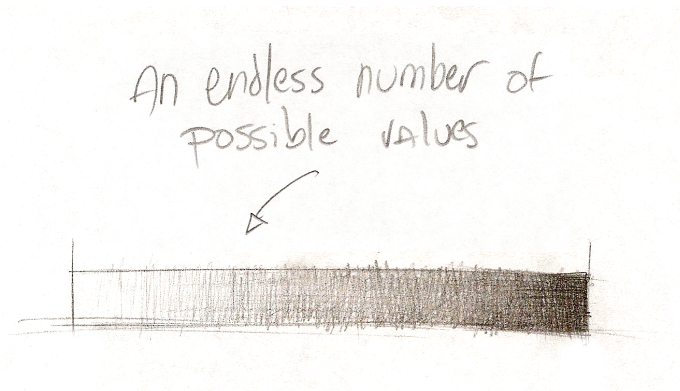
Start by attempting to observe the values of the things around you. Where I am writing, there is a wooden shelf on the wall. The wall is painted white. The shelf is a medium brown. Though the wall is white, it gets darker as less light hits it, as it recedes under the shelf. The shelf is darker on the bottom, where less light is hitting it, and brighter where more light is hitting it. After observing these basic concepts, the trick is in managing how light and dark each of them is in relation to the other.

Squinting

Seeing values can be very complicated; we are often presented with so many at once. There is one crucial tool that you can use to help you see the values more clearly. Squint. Close your eyelids a little bit and the values will become simplified and you will see the relationships clearer. The eyelashes act like a screen in front of your eyes, reducing the total amount of light coming in. It won't give you the best accuracy as far as seeing how light and dark the values are (with your eyes open you can see how light or dark something is), but it will give you a much better idea as far as the *relationship* of the values next to each other and it will show you which values are closer to each other; they will blend together. It will seem awkward at first. Squinting is essential. It will help you solve both of the key aspects of values that I have just covered. Get into the habit as soon as you can. Squint before you start and try to mentally organize. Squint as you are looking for the lights and darks. Squint to make value comparisons. A common example of where squinting will help you is in portrait drawing. There is often a lot of reflected light on the bottom of a person's jaw. The light is reflecting off of their chest, shirt, shoulders, or ground. With your eyes open, you might be tempted to draw the reflected light very light. If you squint down and look at the light, you will most often see it blend into the shadow shape, it is almost as dark as the shadow on the whole. Getting that relationship right is key for giving your drawing the proper depth. Whenever you run into trouble with your values, squint, simplify more, and then look at the relationships.

Simplification

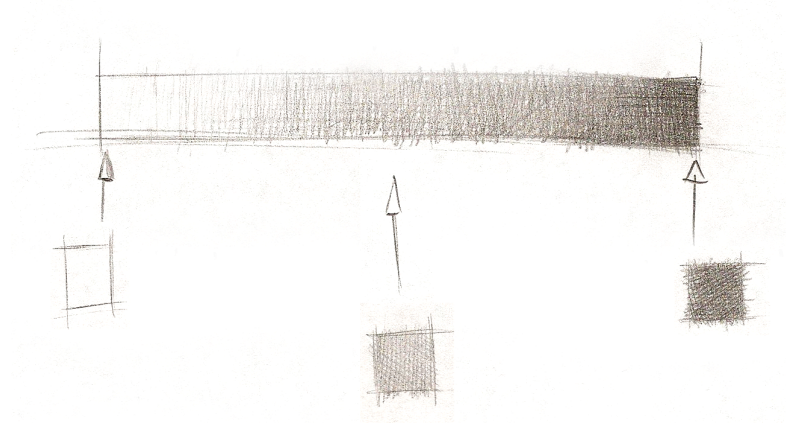
In the same way that you simplify the shapes, you'll want to think about simplifying the values. There is any number of values presented to you in the natural world, but in your drawing you'll want to try and break it down to somewhere between three and nine. You have to make simplifying decisions because you cannot draw it all (and you wouldn't want to even if you could). You have to pick and choose the predominate ones. Back to the spectrum:



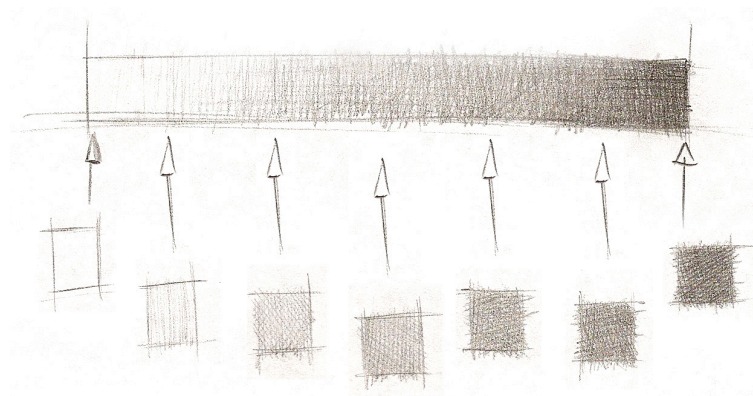
This is the value spectrum available on the paper with my pencil but you'll discover that there is an even greater range of values possible in the real world. You'll want to start thinking about how to narrow down the number of values in your drawing. In a typical discussion of values in art circles, they are broken down into nine values. The lightest value is thought of as a 1 value, the darkest a 9 value, and the value in the middle as a 5 value. If you ever hear somebody refer to a "5 value" they're talking about a middle value between light and dark, regardless of how many values you've broken the drawing into.

Below is some basic theory. Please keep in mind that this is just theoretical. After that I discuss how it is applied.

The simplest way to break down the values is with two values only; a light and dark. A step up from that is to add a middle value. An example of this:

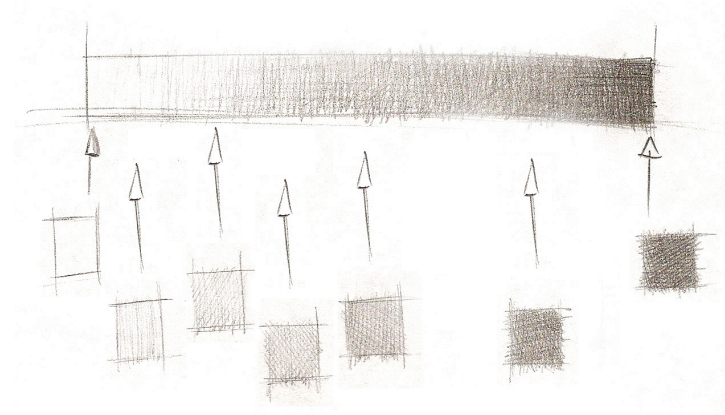


To think about adding more values, all you have to do is add them in between the existing values. If you need another lighter value, you can add one between the middle value and the lightest light. If you need another darker value, you can add one between the middle and the darkest dark.



In the example, I've added two values between each of the previous ones we had established for a total of seven values.

One other thing to note about the simplification of values is that in any drawing you want to look for a light or dark dominance. What I mean by that, is that in any particular lighting situation, one or the other will be more predominate. The drawing is more light than dark or vice versa. Whichever you are choosing to emphasize, you also will use more values in that half. As an example, let's say I was working on a drawing where the subject was mostly on the lighter end of the value range. As I am thinking about how to simplify the values, I would use more values on the lighter end of the spectrum, and fewer on the darker end. This keeps the emphasis in the light. There is no formula. Nature gives you the raw information, it's up to you to organize each individual situation in your drawing.



As for the application, you will see later how the procedure will help you organize them. You can use the subject to make comparisons. Look for the lightest light (the brightest value) and the darkest dark (the darkest value) to make these comparisons. If you are unsure of how light or dark a value is, take a moment to compare it to one of these ends of the spectrum.

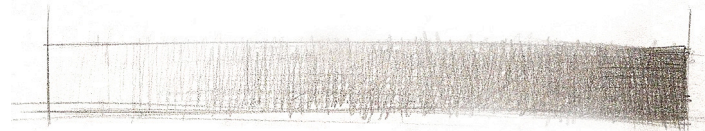
In a drawing there can be many more than nine values, but you will want to think about how to break the values down simply. Oftentimes, I break down the main area of my drawing into four values (the lightest light, a middle value, a dark value, and the darkest dark), and then add more if needed.

It is important to have the understanding (from the last few pages) but the real important key is to be able to group values together and make proper comparisons. Five values isn't better than three, or nine, but being able to tell that something is distinctly lighter or darker than something next to it is crucial. Use this understanding to help you think about how you are grouping values together but do not become too strict on adhering to a number. Take your time to make the proper comparisons.

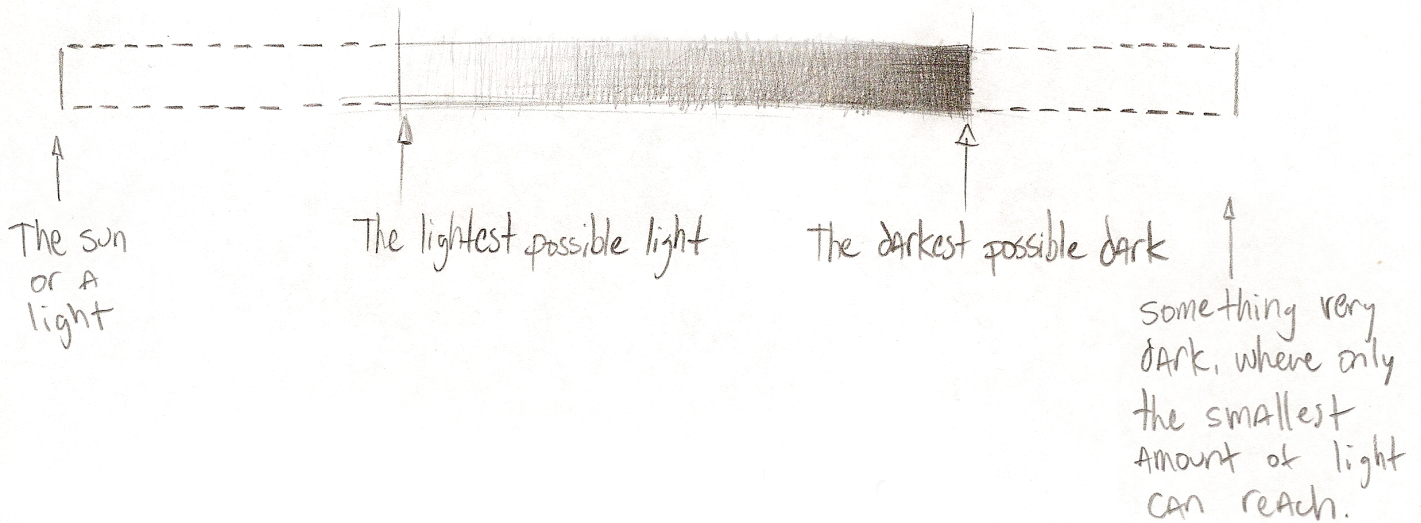


Relativity

Hand in hand with simplifying values you must consider their lights and darks in relation to each other. The challenge is that the relative values of your working surface are much more limited than the values presented to you in the world. The brightness of your paper pales in comparison with the brightness of the sun, a light, or even any of these light sources bouncing off of a reflective object. Remember the values that are available on your paper:

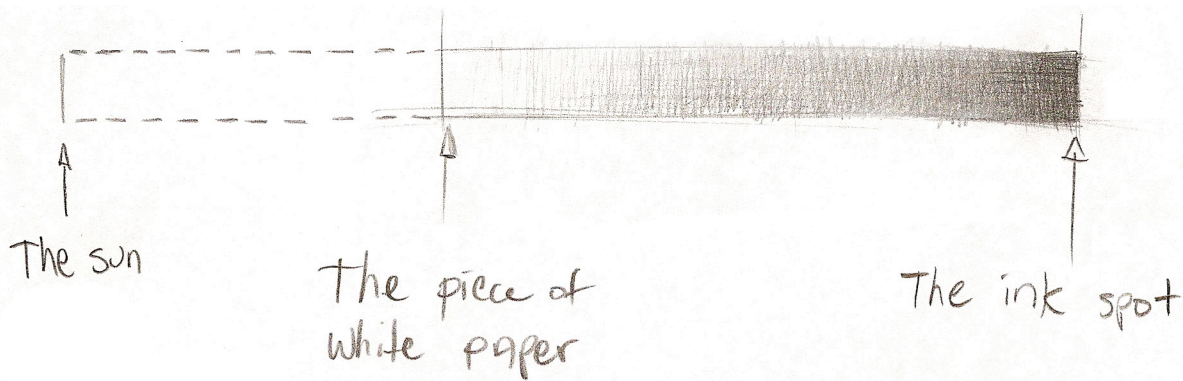


It's a scale all the way from the lightest light to the darkest dark. However, the lights that are around you now are much lighter than the light of the paper. Hold your paper up in front of a light (or the sun, if you're daring) and compare how light they are relative to each other. The light, or sun, is much brighter. Although it's impossible for me to accurately represent here (I can only use the values of the paper), the spectrum in the world would look something like what follows.

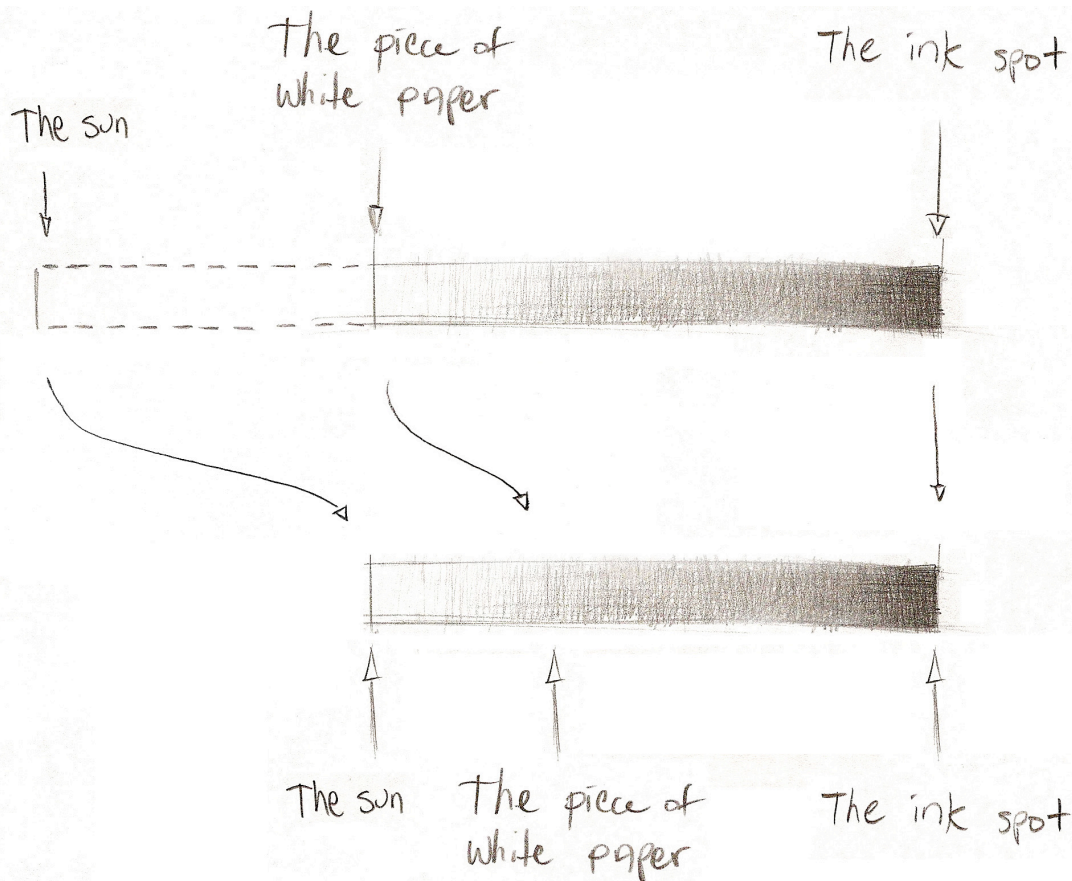


You can see from the additions that the value scale in the world is much larger than the value scale available on the paper. It's not only the lights (though that's the most obvious) but there are dark areas in life that are darker than your charcoal or ink can go; places where only the smallest amount of light can reach them. It's not nearly as obvious as the distinction with the light side but it is important to realize.

What this means is that to show the brightness of the brightest values, relative to everything darker, you have to observe how light and dark these values are in relation to each other in life, and then keep that relationship when you translate it in your drawing. As a simple example (for theoretical purposes, don't do this), let's say you held a piece of white paper with an ink spot up toward the sun. You would have three values.

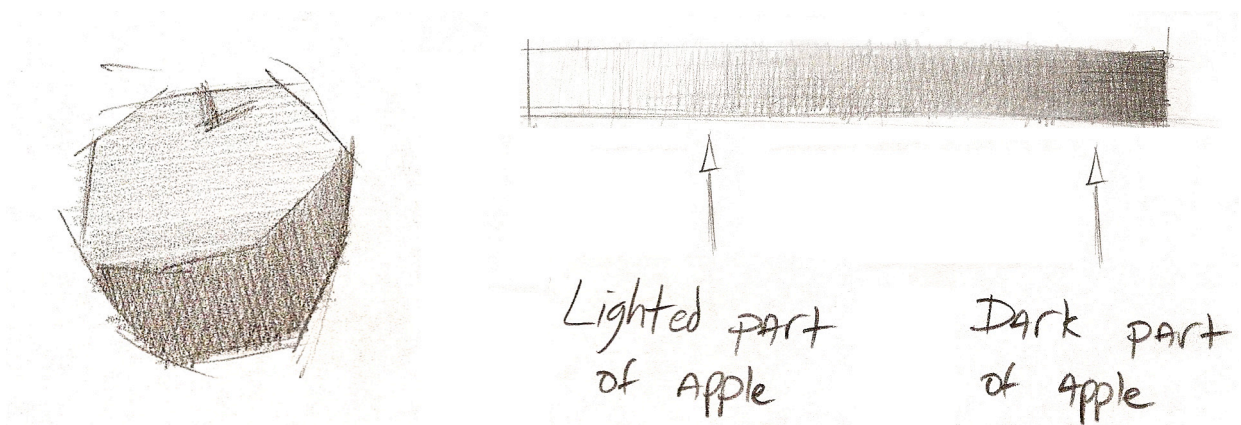


You would notice that, though the white of the paper is very white, it is nowhere as bright as the sun. This means that when you're drawing this, you would have to keep the same value *relationship* when you translate it to your drawing. The sun would be represented by the whitest possible white of the paper, and the white of the paper would have to go darker to keep the same relationship and show the brightness of the sun.

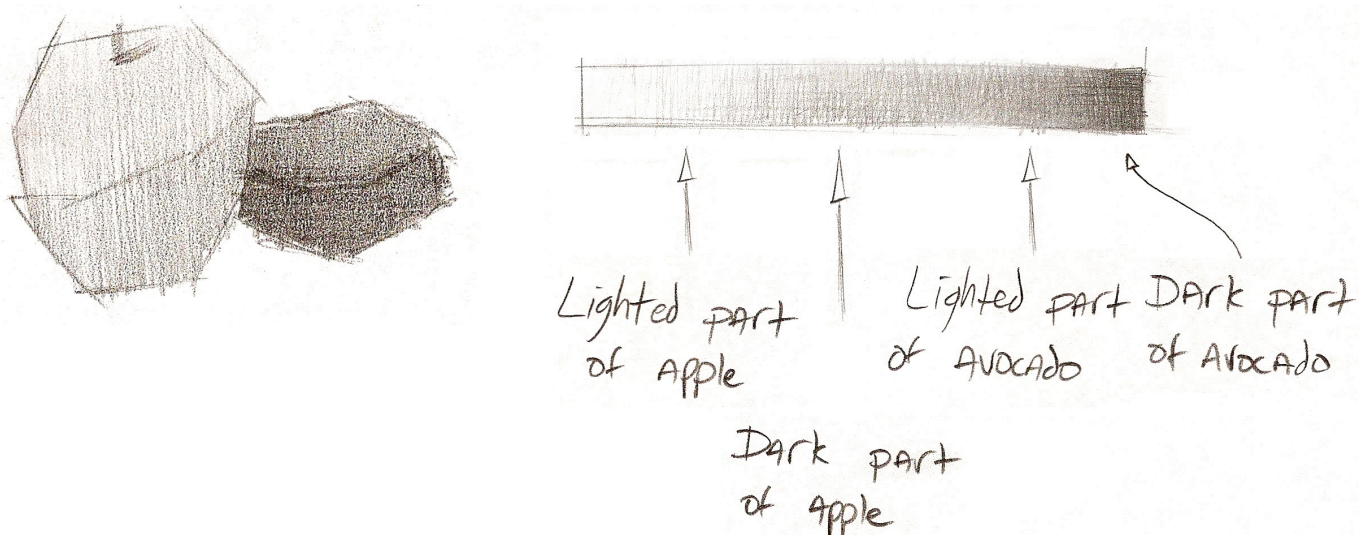


That is a simple example to show how the values need to be translated in relation to each other. In everything around you the challenge is much more complicated, which is why simplifying the values is so important. Once you try to factor in all the various things that are happening in front of you, it is easy to get overwhelmed. Look for things that are so similar that they could be rendered as the same value (ex: a person's brown hair and the brownness of a desk). Then, when you are translating these values in the real world into your drawing, look for the relationship that the values have with each other.

The problem of value can get very complicated in a hurry. Another thing to keep in mind is how the values can change depending on the context (what is around the values that you're looking at). In the following example, let's say I am drawing an green apple and I break it down into two values, the lighted part of the apple, and the shadow part of the apple.



Once I place an avocado next to the apple, the values change completely. What appeared to be dark on the apple, is very light in relation, and must be adjusted.



The appearance of the values changes completely! The relationship of how light the lighted part of the apple is to the dark part is the same, but they appear lighter now because there is a darker element in the drawing. This is very important to see. We want to maintain the lightness of the apple with the darkness of the apple, but we also want to show the darkness of the avocado compared to the apple. So the dark part of the apple has to get lighter in order to show the contrast of the lightness of the apple with the darkness of the avocado. If we introduced a fruit that was lighter than both of them then the values of the apple would both get closer to the middle of the scale, to make room for the contrasting lightness of the third fruit on the other end.

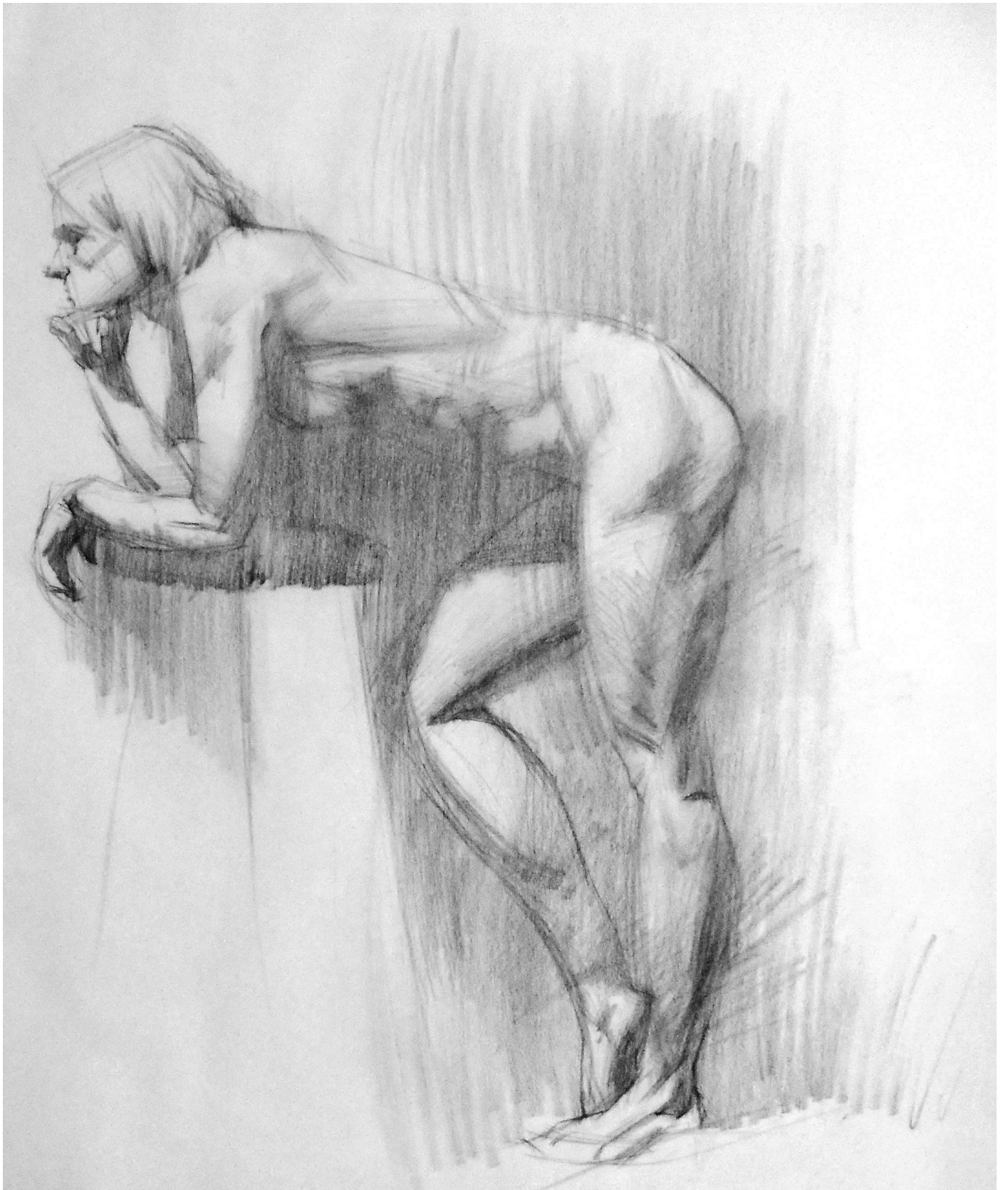
It is vital to understand that the values have to be in relation to each other and these are hopefully simple ways to understand and begin to see this. Look at how light or dark something is then compare that with everything around it. Is it lighter than the thing next to it? Darker than the thing in front of it? You'll start to notice all kinds of things that you never noticed before. The whites of the eyes aren't very bright, they're a middle gray. Mountains get pretty light as they get further away from you. As you start to notice these things, and translate them into your drawings, your drawings will have a much more advanced sense of depth and feel.



Values in the picture

You can use the values in the picture to help convey the message, you don't have to just copy the values that you are looking at in life. Your eye is typically drawn to an area of higher contrast, where the brightest parts are next to the darkest parts in the drawing. You'll want to emphasize areas where you want people to look. If you were doing a full sized portrait drawing, and the area of highest contrast is in the pant leg, you might not want to draw so much attention to that area, so diminish the contrast. The first step toward successful values is to begin to see them, then you will learn how to translate them properly. Once you get to that point, use what you know to reinforce what you want to say. Don't feel trapped into rendering everything exactly as you see it. You probably have something better to say than what is literally in front of you. This idea will come to you over time, as your practice, but it is good to keep in mind along the way. Use these tools as a means for your expression, don't become a slave to the principles.





Edges

You'll see that many of the same problems and solutions of edges are the same as values. The "edge" is the border between two different objects or values. As the surface of an object turns there will be an edge. As light hits an object there will be edges between the light and dark. As something changes color there may be edges. One object in front of another creates an edge. Edges vary from lost (no discernable change from one to another) to hard (a sharp change). In drawing a portrait, if the subject has darker skin, against a lighter background, it might seem like a hard edge where the two, visually, come together. If they have darker hair, against a dark background, it might seem that the hair just fades into the background with no discernable changing from one to another. First, you must be able to observe the changes happening then organize them in the drawing. Later, you will see how the procedure is geared to help you organize these things toward the finish.

As soon as you make a mark on the paper, you have created a light shape against a dark shape (values) with some sort of transition between them (edges). How you've decided to translate what you're seeing is the simplification and design, and the way you put the mark on the paper relative to the other marks is measuring. I mention this again here because I want you to start to get a picture of how these things are working together. I also want to reinforce how drawing is not some mystical thing that people born with the ability are able to conjure up. Drawing is a skill that can be learned by almost anyone. It takes years to learn how to organize the problems in your mind, but with the proper dedication and instruction anyone can achieve proficiency.

An old illustrator saying is that, "If it looks right, it is right". All that matters is that the result is what you wanted, whether you followed the principles or not. However, using the principles will generally give you a better chance of success and more articulate expression. If you are looking at something that is very vague, such as a beard or a cloud, you have to draw it very vaguely, otherwise it won't look much like the beard or cloud you're experiencing (unless you wouldn't want to make it that vague, for some reason). It is a common mistake to want to detail or show everything, but in doing so you will ruin the power of your expression. There is expressiveness in the way life appears to you. If you want something with a hard edge, you've got to think about how to get that hard edge that you want. If you want things to be blurry or fluffy, you've got to think about how to draw them blurred or fluffy. The variance with which you draw things will show the texture, depth, and variance in your subjects. Think about it, look for it then practice doing it! You've got to do all three to really understand.

Simplification and Relativity

You'll notice that this chapter on edges is starting out very much like the chapter on values. That's because the principles are the same. They're combined in edges because the theory is the same. In part, values and edges can affect each other. A strong contrast between a light value and a dark value coming together immediately can create a hard edge. Where two things barely seem to merge together can cause some confusion as far as the values go. Much like values, the key is to simplify the edges while keeping them in relation to each other. In life, there are innumerable edges where objects and values are coming together, rolling away from your eye, or overlapping one another. You've got to try to think of them simply. In common artist vernacular, edges are thought of as being one of four types. Of course, once you understand this, you can break it down in whatever way is most beneficial for you, but this is a general way of beginning to think about them. Edges fall in one of four categories: Hard, Firm, Soft, and Lost.

Hard edge- The sharpest point where two values or objects come together.

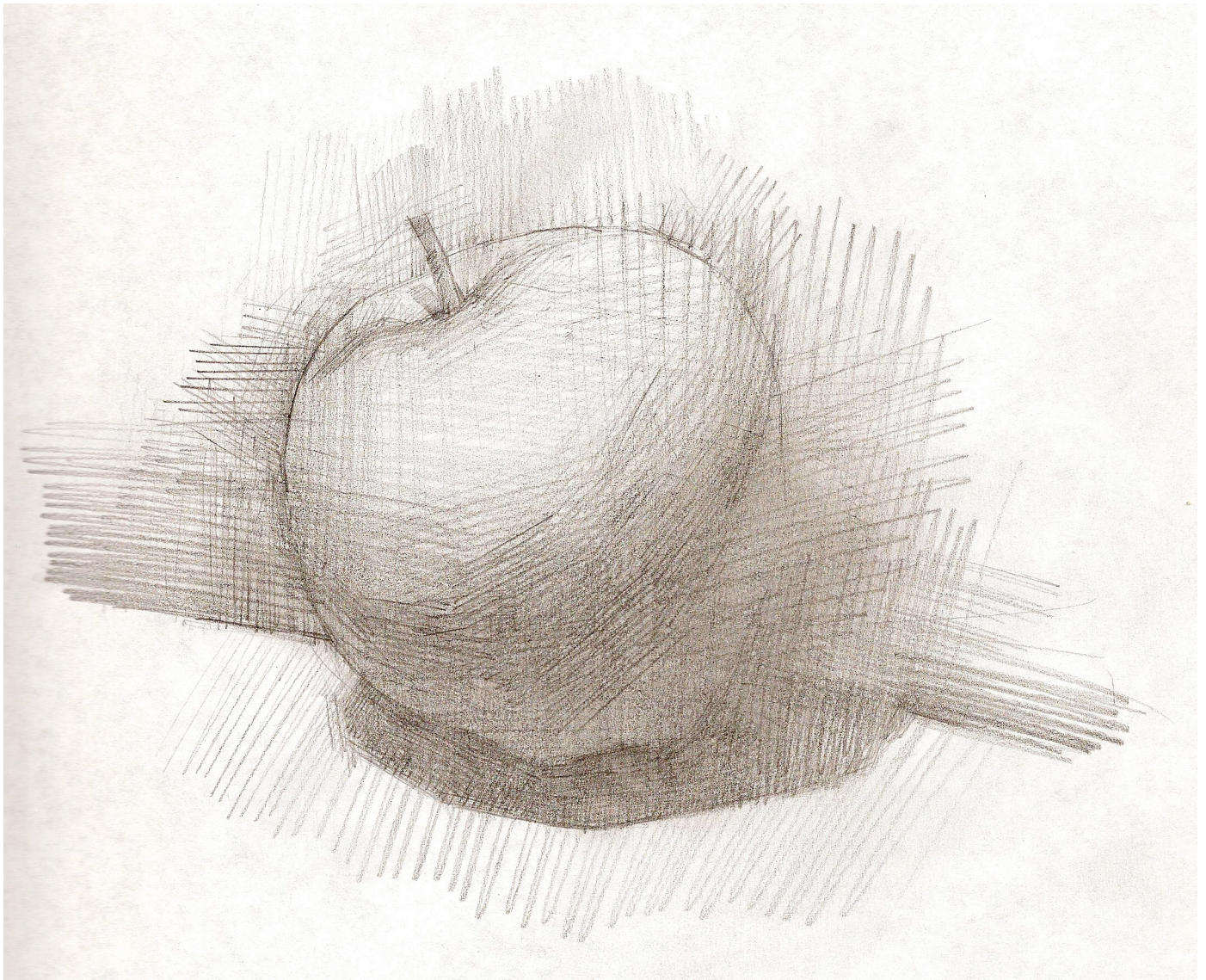
Firm edge- A definable edge. Not a hard edge, not a soft edge, but decently definable.

Soft edge- A very gentle rolling away or overlapping. Not a lot of definition.

Lost edge- You cannot tell where one starts and the other begins.

When you look at an edge, try to imagine which of the four categories it might go in. By simply categorizing the edges, it will help you to keep them organized. If you are not sure what an edge might be, compare it to another edge! Find the hardest edge in the whole piece. Then find the softest. Now you have two ways to compare edges. Is it as hard as the hard edge? Maybe it is also not quite as soft as a soft edge, so it's a firm edge. It's very basic to read, but it's much more complicated to apply, and this is because in each drawing you will be presented with a hundred or a thousand problems you must manage. It's not just one edge, simplified, in relation to one other edge, simplified, but a thousand edges in relation to a thousand more. The way it starts, though, is by comparing one edge with another. The more you can slow down and compare the edges, with accuracy, the better your mind will be able to handle a variety of other problems as you grow more comfortable.

In the following example, look at the edges around the circumference of the apple. You will see a hard edge on the left. You will see a lost edge on the right. As the edge of the apple winds around, it varies from the hard edge to the lost edge, depending upon the contour of the apple, and the contrast of the apple to the background. On the right hand side, I also did not define the edge between the table and the background where the shadow was dark. Everything inside the darkness blends together, yet it doesn't look out of place. Since the actual shape of the apple is rather uniform, much of the edge difference has to do with the contrast to the background, but I changed it depending upon what I thought would look best where. There is no single way to apply this idea of edges, which is an important thing to understand. You want to know what to do, when to do it, and to do what looks best for what you are trying to communicate.



You'll notice that the concepts are not super advanced. It's not magical. It's not a mystical thing that some people are born with. It's a visual puzzle requiring a visual comparison. A simple puzzle, like a piece of fruit, has a lot less problems in it than an advanced problem; a figure or portrait. Of course, the main reason people get inspired to draw is because they want to draw all of the awesome people, places, and things around us. When you are learning, keep it simple. If you struggle with a simple problem, you're going to struggle many times over with a more complicated problem. I want to be clear, I'm not telling you to wait until you are perfect to move on to advanced problems. I am only saying that it will benefit you greatly to practice on many simple problems. It's okay, even when first starting, to draw portraits, landscapes, or whatever else suits you. Try to incorporate advanced drawings that are your passion and inspiration into your routine of many shorter, smaller, simpler studies. The short, simple studies will help to organize your mind. You will find that, after a multitude of short, small studies that your problem solving abilities in the longer drawings will be much greater. It is important to do both.



Other helpful knowledge

There are a few other things that are very helpful to know that some would call fundamentals, but I find them less universal. The difference is in what I consider to be fundamental is related to your ability to observe the world. What follows below is related to technical knowledge to help you interpret what you are seeing. There are many artists who have come before me, many teaching today even, who are much more comprehensive on these subjects, so I didn't feel there would be much value in repeating what I know. However, if you want to be the best that you possibly can, it will help you immeasurably to study these concepts from other artists. I mention them here so that you are aware.

Understanding anatomy is very helpful but it is not very helpful if you have not learned how to see what is in front of you. The purpose of the learning in this book is to help you *see*, then tell a visual story. Remember that, outside of a few fundamentals that work almost every time, much of what you will learn is applied in a very relative sense, and only as a *means*. Learning anatomy or measuring is only a tool to make your drawings, your articulation, your story, better. It is not used for the sake of becoming a technical expert at either.

As an example, many doctors know a lot more about anatomy than artists, but that doesn't make them very good at drawing. Mathematicians know a lot about problem solving and ratios and such, but that doesn't make them very good at drawing either. It's about being able to observe, understanding these things in combination to each other. With the inspiration of life in front of you, and these tools at your disposal, your drawings will improve. Anatomy and Perspective are mentioned here because they are both very helpful, I would recommend the study of both to any serious aspirant.

Anatomy

Literally, the study of the physical anatomy of a subject. The hand, the skull, the body, animals, etc. It's all about learning the skeletal, muscular, structural makeup of a particular subject. Anatomy is helpful because it will give you a better understanding of the forms. It will help you to understand what you are seeing and simplify it. It can provide a template for your understanding. If you understand the forms (such as the anatomy of the arm) then you will understand what you are looking at when you look at a person's arm. Just be aware not to let your understanding of the arm get in the way of observing every unique arm that you lay eyes on. Any anatomy that you learn is only a general idea; an average way that a creature is put together. Each actual subject will have some variance.

To learn anatomy, outside of a class or workshop, the best way is to copy drawings out of an anatomy book. Set the drawing next to you and do your best to recreate it accurately. I tend to skip the super literal rendering (I will not draw many muscle striations) because it's not helpful to what I want to accomplish. Just be aware, if your goal is to learn the forms, do your best to learn the forms. Do your best to learn the way that the other artist simplified. But copying doesn't mean you have to striate every muscle; that may not be helpful. A few books I have found to be very helpful, and available to purchase cheaply on the internet:

"The Human Figure" by John Vanderpoel

"Bridgman's Complete Guide to Life Drawing" by George B Bridgman

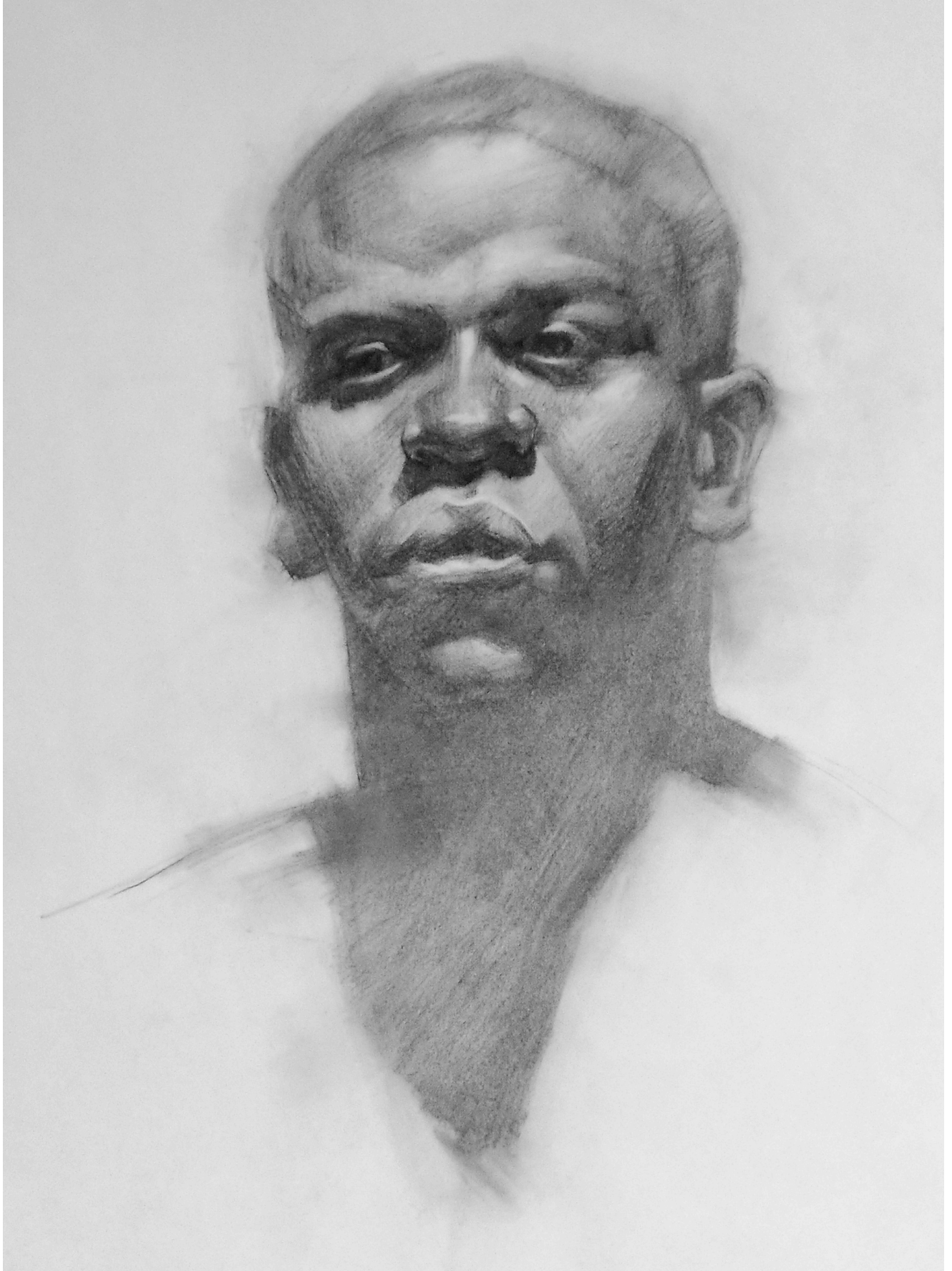
"Anatomy for the Artist" by Jeno Barcsay.

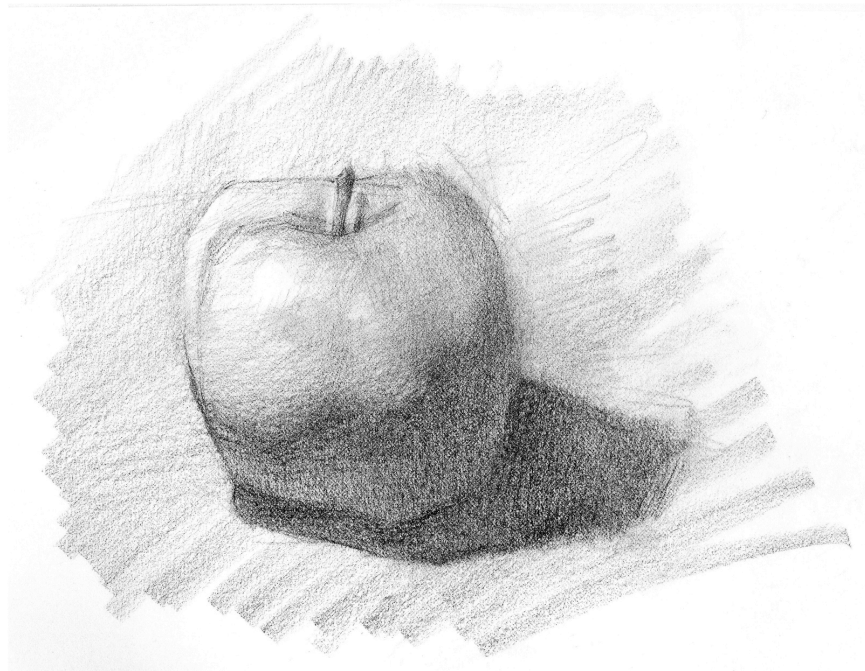
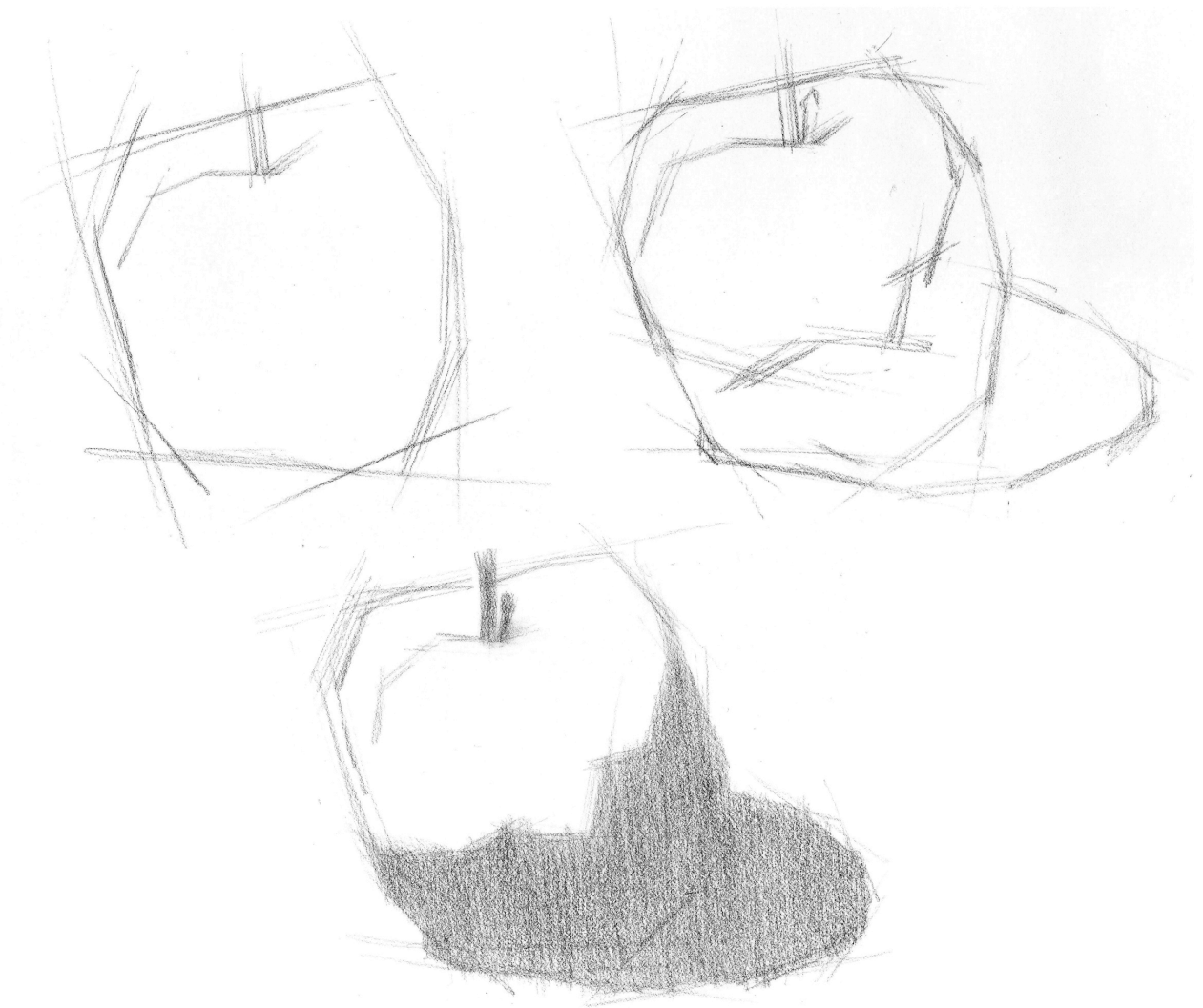
Perspective

Perspective is the understanding of how the 3-dimensional world around us is represented in 2-dimensions, on your paper. Perspective is very helpful to aid you in learning to observe. It is very useful as a guide in a drawing, or as a reference for correction if something is not looking right. Think of it as a tool to supplement what you are seeing, or to help you see, but it's no replacement for what is in front of you. Drawing in perspective, for the sake of drawing in perspective, typically produces very technical, boring drawings.

To learn perspective you can find many free sources, maybe even video demos on the internet, to get as much information as you would ever need. I purchased a DVD from Gnomon Workshop a while back and it has been all the resource I have ever needed.

"Techniques of Scott Robertson 1: Basic Perspective Form Drawing"





Procedure

The procedure is how you will put the tools together. In building a house, there's a process: dig and pour a foundation, raise a skeleton structure (framing), put on a roof and walls, and then refine the insides. The process I am going to go over for drawing is very similar to my observations on building a house. Is that the only way to build a house? As little as I know about building, I can say that it is probably not the only way to go about it. It is, however, one way that works. It's not the only way, and it may not even be the best way (depending on the house), but it is one way to go about getting that end result that you're after. In learning that particular way of building you will learn it's advantages and shortcomings.

I am going to show you a way that works for me. It isn't the only way that works. Amazing artists can take two opposite approaches and end up with two beautiful drawings. If you do not yet have a way of working, it will be particularly effective. Once you've learned this one way of doing things, you will be opened up to the ideas of how to proceed to an orderly finish and then you can find any number of ways to get there. If you do not have an orderly way of working, I would highly suggest sticking to one way of doing things. Practice doing things in one way for a length of time, until you become proficient, and you will find all other ways easier to grasp. If you are learning, and constantly changing your approach, your struggle will never end.

The more you slow down and stick to the procedure, the faster and better you get. Difficult problems become simple over time, and over more time, intuitive. Slow down and focus on the accuracy. Even if you are in a situation with strong time constraints, such as a life drawing session with 2 minute poses, you can still start each drawing calmly and proceed in an orderly way. Don't let time rush you into a poor result. Once you have the procedure ingrained into the way you work, you'll understand why drawing can be approached this way and you'll be able to take shortcuts or deviate entirely. A majority of the drawings in the book are in three hours time, or less, and many are as short as 20 minutes.

When I first started learning a lot of this information I would try to rush through a drawing. When I got tired of doing lousy drawings, I slowed down and focused on accuracy. Where I previously spent two hours rushing to a finish and one hour staring at a terrible drawing, I started spending three hours just laying the drawing in. I went slow, measured, drew, looked, measured, drew, refined, looked, measured, and so on, for the full time. I spent more time looking and measuring than drawing. My ability to measure improved in accuracy and speed. After years of thoughtful, slow practice, I can do in two hours intuitively what I used to not be able to comprehend in three hours.

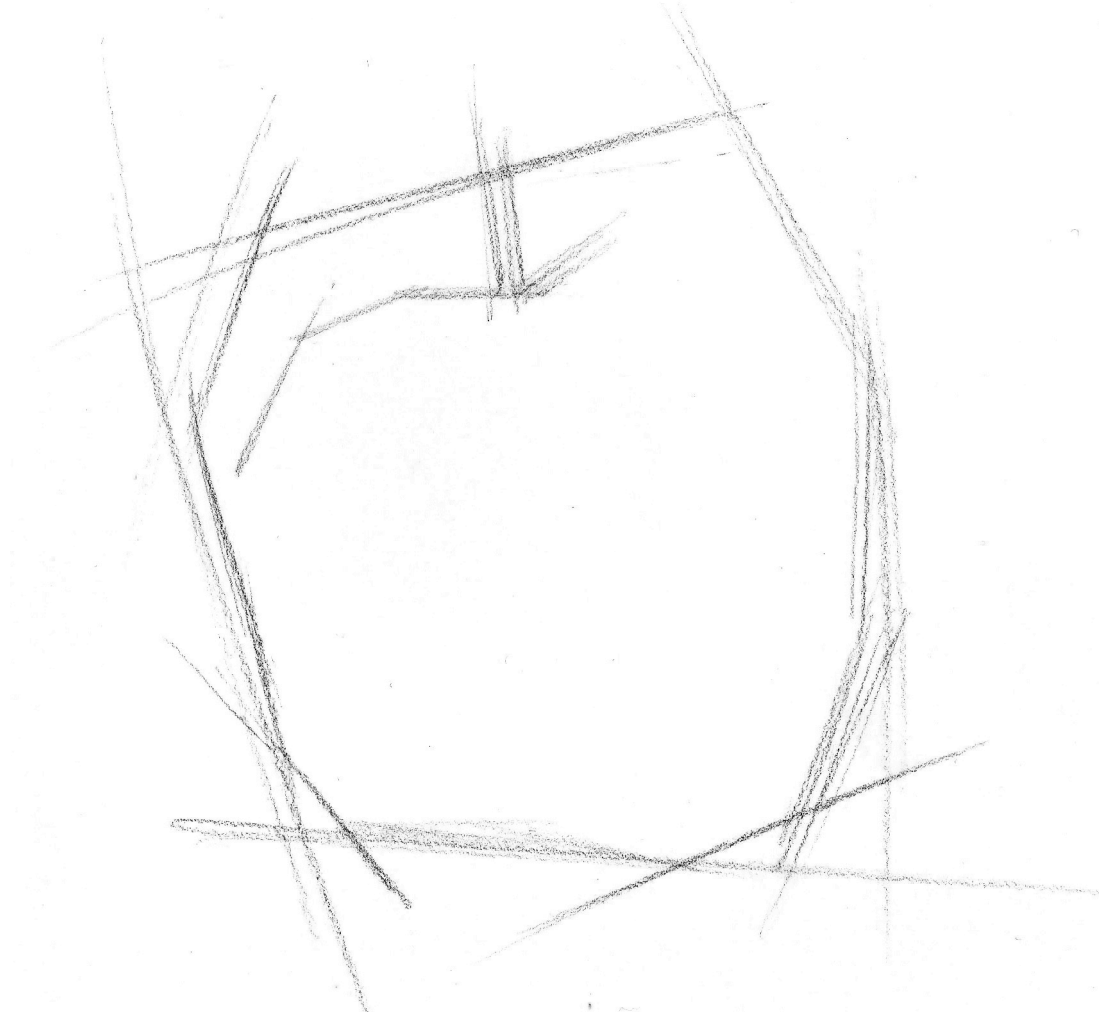
I am emphasizing this throughout the book because it is very important. All of the information in the world is useless if you are not inspired to use it. You can read a thousand books on running a marathon and never be able to even complete one until after a long period of training. The bad news is that it's up to you, how good you want to be. Nobody can do it for you. The good news is that it's up to you, how good you want to be. If you want to get better, you can put in the work to make it happen. The only limit to how good you can get is how much you are willing to work in a thoughtful, concentrated manner. How motivated you are to action will largely determine your success.

I've broken the procedure into four steps. The beginner will find this very difficult at first but extremely liberating down the road. The procedure is not a step-by-step formula to follow but an organization of the fundamentals. I don't want to teach you a specific way to approach a particular problem, I want to teach you a particular way of problem solving that can be applied to any problem. The difficulty in learning is that you have to figure out constantly the best way to apply it, but the benefit is that you should not end up very tied to a system; with real skills in it's place. It takes a mighty struggle to gain real power. A sword is only as deadly as the samurai who wields it.

Be prepared to struggle. Be prepared to work. Be prepared to be frustrated with the results. Then let it all go and keep going. The problems might not all seem clear to you at the start but as you keep honestly attempting to solve what you can see, the problems will become clearer, along with your method of solving them.

Remember that each step of the procedure has a purpose. The purpose revolves around organization, simplification, and clarity. Learning the steps serves to help you understand important ideas and organize them. (You'll see how the procedure helps you to simplify the values and keep the relative to each other, two important facets of values that I discussed). Once you understand the ideas, you may not need the steps, strictly speaking. But do not skip them or toss them aside altogether until you understand them. The understanding comes through honest practice.

Step 1: Three Dimensional Construction



It all starts here. You wouldn't want to finish a building on a lousy foundation. This is where you set yourself up for success. In this step, look for, and think about, the three-dimensional shape of the subject. Obviously, the example of the apple is very simple but you can page through the book for a few examples of more complex beginnings. You want to begin each drawing by trying to break it down simply. You can start with a ratio measurement if you like, finding the length and height of the subject and putting a box on the page as a rough measurement. Look for some strong, obvious lines and start simplifying them into straight lines as you measure the relative distances. Hold your pencil loosely. Use your whole arm to block in big lines. Look for the biggest shapes. Squint down to see the strongest values. Forget about the nostrils if you haven't drawn the head, or even the rough shape of the nose yet. Start out in a large, general manner but look to tighten up your measurements as you start to get an idea of where you are going and where to go.

For example, start with the ratio, then the big shapes of the head, then make sure that smaller shapes are in line and in proportion with the bigger ones that you have laid down. In a portrait, I will usually start with the eyes. Once the eyes are in relation to each other, then I look for the nose, and then the mouth. It is easier to measure smaller distances than larger ones. I'll get some rough shapes in to start, then start nailing down a smaller area in some sort of organic fashion. This usually means that I will end up not quite in line with the first measurements, which is fine. I am not trying to draw in line with my first measurements, I am trying to draw something as best as possible; the first measurements have helped to get me started.

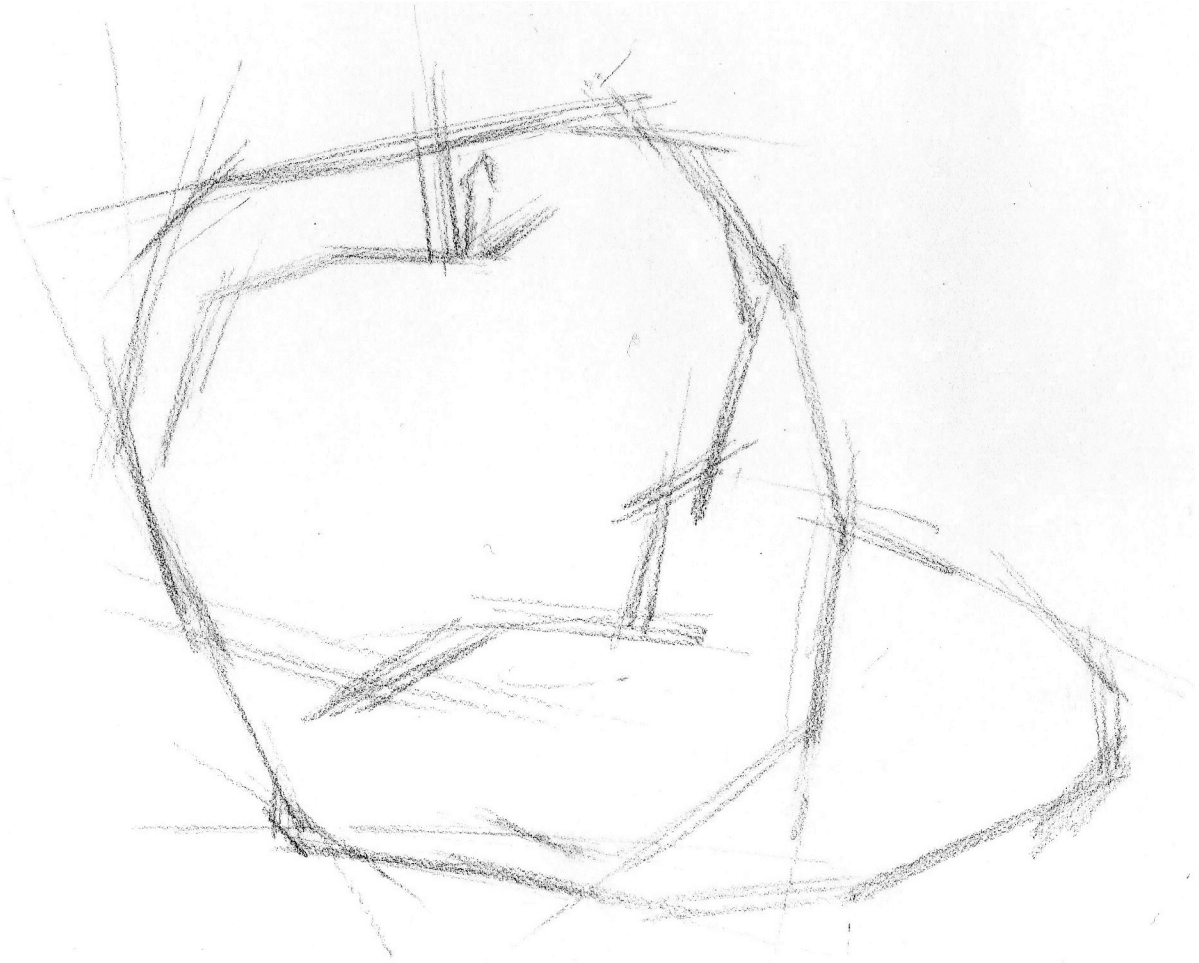
If the previous measurements are no longer accurate, get some better measurements. No problem. Don't be afraid to erase! If there is one time in the drawing when you want to erase, this is the time! It is a thousand times easier to fix a mistake at this point than at the end of the drawing. Each mistake fixed here saves you a ton of trouble down the road. I do a lot of erasing at this point. I cannot stress this enough, especially if you are a beginner: slow down! Measure and simplify. Look for how you can take a curve and simply design it into two or three straight lines. Measure the distance between sides or different parts and compare them. Make sure pieces are in line with each other (relative measuring). There is no right amount of time to spend here and at some point you have to move on, but the longer you can stay here and get things right, the better your drawing will be set up for the end. Once you feel like you've got a good grasp, move on.

It is also very helpful at this point to imagine all the complex shapes as simpler shapes. The arm can be a cylinder. You can add more details as you go along. Look for ways to break down the complicated shapes into simpler shapes.

During this step of the procedure, you're looking for ways to break down the complicated shapes into simpler ones. You're going to use a combination of the measuring and simplifying. Start with some measurements, simplify the shapes, and keep simplifying and measuring as you go along, building from what you've got. You can measure big areas, big distances to give yourself an idea, then refine the measurements as you get more detailed. Work from the simplest shapes to the more detailed, the biggest to the smallest.

This will take practice. There is no single way to go about it. Don't get discouraged. Try to learn how to see better with each attempt. See my video called "Starting the Drawing" on youtube for an example.

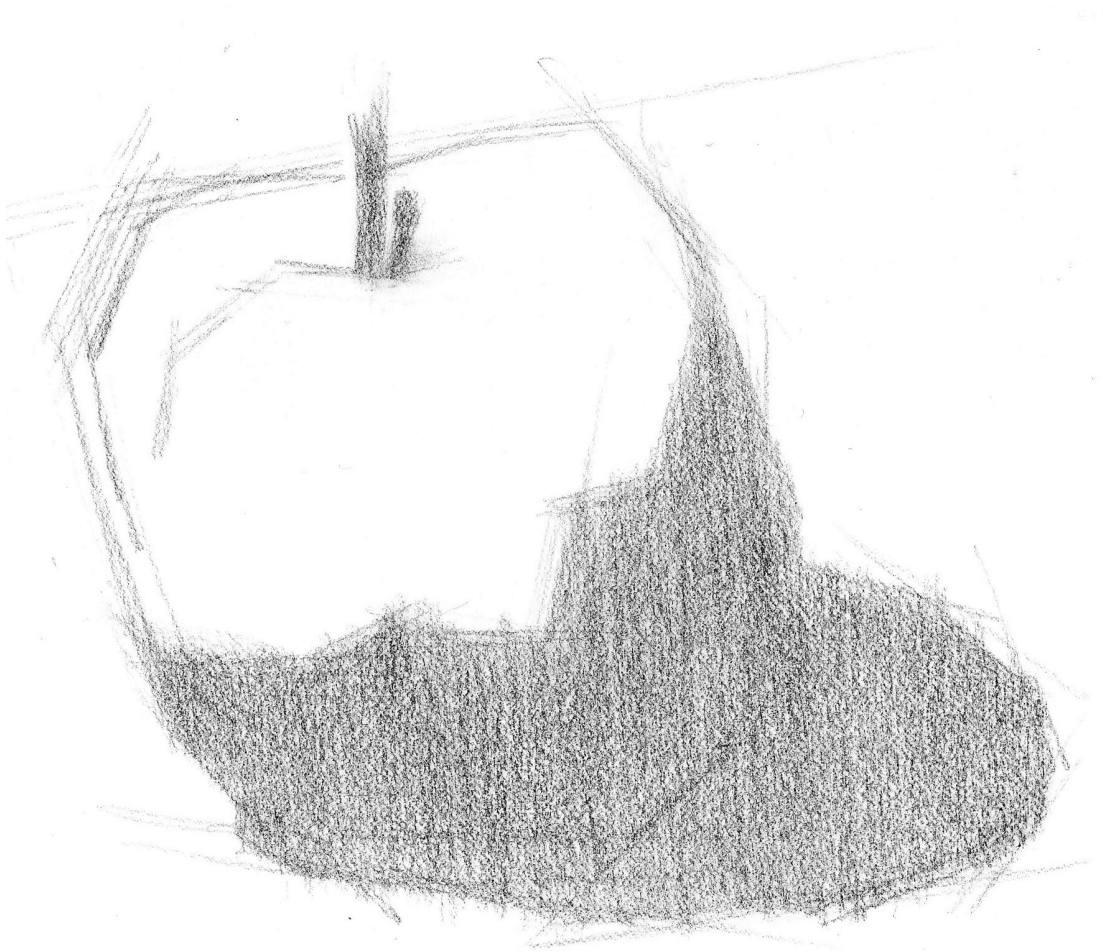
Step 2: Light and Dark



You will see, in the above example, that the drawing is very similar to the previous step. Now I have added where the light is hitting the apple. I've marked it with straight lines, just as before. I've darkened these images for the book but normally these lines are very light. You can see how the straight lines overlap. I'm keeping it loose and keeping it simple. As you become familiar with these concepts, you can combine these first two steps. You can incorporate the shadows, or the dividing line between light and dark, into your initial measurements.

Additionally, it might help you to measure from the edge of an object to a shadow's edge. That's fine. You can use the construction and the division between light and dark to work off of each other. You can see other examples in the beginning of the book of how I have combined the first two steps all at once. If you have trouble seeing the dividing between light and dark, squint!

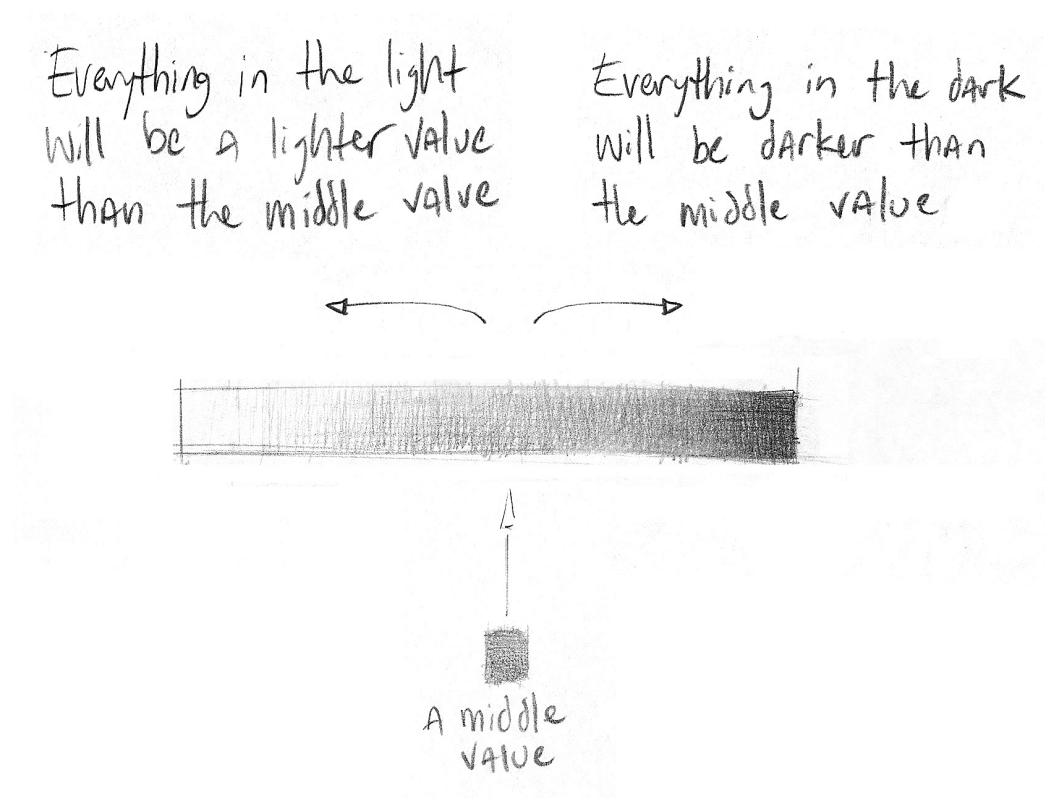
Step 3: Values



This is the linchpin of the whole procedure. It might look like I just filled in the dark areas but that is not all that this step entails. I did fill in the dark areas but I also am adjusting the shapes and continuing to measure. This step will give you a good visual look at how the drawing is going to start to turn out. There's still a lot left to do, but now you can get a feel for what is going to turn out. See the example in the beginning of the book again for an idea of how this step looks when the object is more complicated.

Early on, you have the opportunity to build a structure and correct mistakes. It helps to split the lights and the darks apart so you can keep them organized. Once you have them split, the lights will not go darker than the darks, and the darks will not go lighter than the lights. It might not seem obvious, but the part of the apple not getting hit by light wouldn't be lighter than the part getting hit by the light. Making this simple distinction will help you to keep the values organized.

You'll see in the little example below how this stage helps to break up the values. You've got the dark areas of the drawing shaded in with a middle value, which splits the values into two halves: those that will be darker and those that will be lighter.

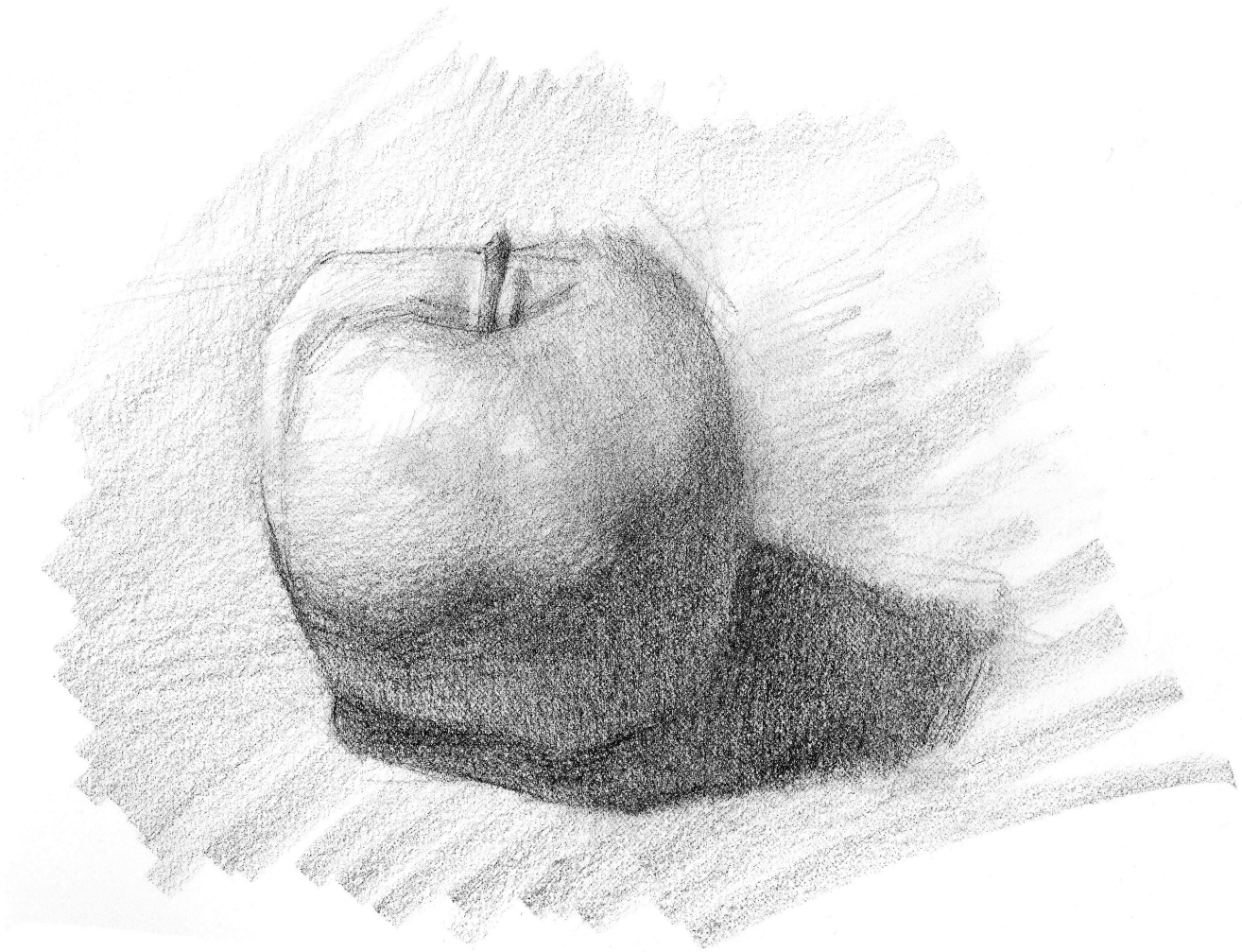


You should see how this makes it easy to stay organized. You've done the work of dividing the lights and darks and now you've got a middle value. From here, darks go darker and lights go lighter (from the middle value). This eliminates confusion and gives the drawing clarity!

Also, with your values so simple, it is still relatively easy to fix mistakes at this point. If you haven't scarred the paper, big sections or even whole objects could be moved around. This part in the drawing is the last real good chance to fix any big mistakes and they should become apparent to you here, now that you can see the values.

Hopefully you can see how much of drawing is just a repeating of fundamental ideas, combined with an organized approach to solving the problems. You do a couple things repeatedly as you put the visual puzzle piece together. Over time you learn to organize your mind and approach.

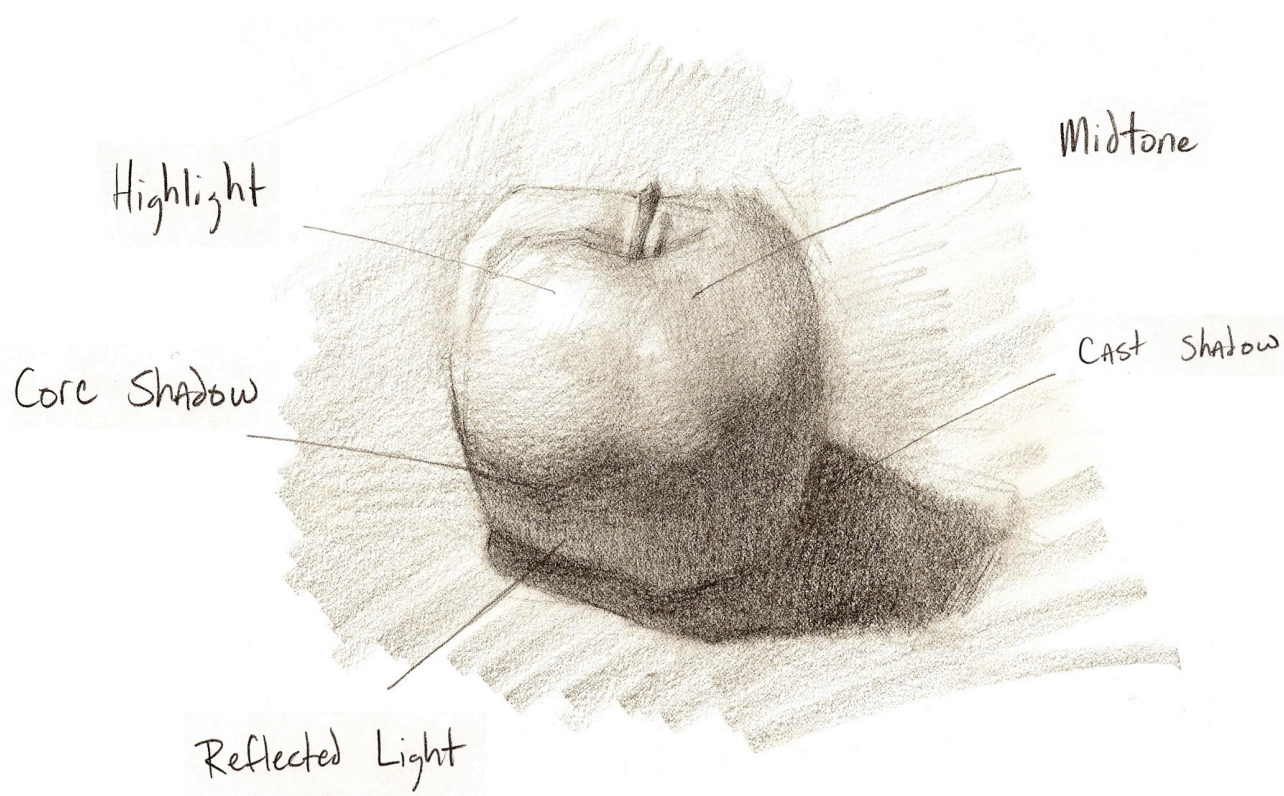
Step 4: Rendering



This step is a continuance of the fundamentals, into the details. Refining shapes, continuing to measure, detailing the values and edges. You separated the values and you can continue to refine them. You have been making more accurate measurements as you go along and you continue. This is the part where you flesh out the drawing to the finish.

When is a drawing finished? It is a matter of time and opinion. It might be that you run out of time. If you knew beforehand that this might be the case, you can always proceed in a way to be able to stop with something that looks finished. Otherwise it is a matter of your own opinion. Have you said what you wanted to say? Then the drawing is finished. Some people would say that you have to detail everything but the reality is that it is you who decides when the drawing is finished. When you have decided it is finished, then it is finished.

I have found it helpful to think about the five things happening with the light at this stage.



Highlight: The highlight is where the object appears lightest. Typically, the light is hitting at around 90 degrees to your eye. As the form rolls away (from the light and) from the highlight, you will see it turn into..

Midtone: The form as it rolls away from the light. You will see how the midtone rolls away in every direction from the highlight. As the form rolls away from the light, into the dark, you will see the..

Core Shadow: As the form rolls out of the light it turns into shadow. The core shadow is a darker portion of the shadow, usually close to where the form first turns into the shadow. As the form goes further into shadow, you will notice..

Reflected Light: The form is rolling away from where the shadow begins, light is hitting objects behind the portion that is lit, and reflecting the light back into the shadow. Reflected light can get tricky. If you look at it with your eyes open, it will appear light. If you squint, you will see that it is actually very close to as dark as the darker areas of the shadows.

Cast Shadow: This shadow can be as dark (or darker) than the core shadow. The cast shadow is when an object is blocking the light from hitting whatever is behind it (much like your shadow outside is you blocking the sun from hitting the ground).

You've learned how to measure, continue measuring, and how to make the measurements tighter and more accurate. You've learned how to compare values, continue to add more values, and detail the forms. You've learned how to design the shapes, starting simple, and then keep detailing the shapes as you go along. Keep adding to the edges. Keep defining the areas that you feel need definition. There's nothing magical here; what you have learned to do already, the fundamentals, you just keep doing it. The procedure is designed to help you manage these things as you go along.

There is no singular way to get to the end. There is no hard and fast rule about when a drawing is done, except this: the drawing is done as soon as you have said what you wanted to say. There is no easy way to figure out how you will be most comfortable and most successful while working. Now you've got the fundamentals, you've got a general procedure to guide you along the way, now the rest is up to you to practice and figure out. Be brave. Make mistakes. Give your maximum effort. Be honest with yourself. Draw from life as much as possible. Watch yourself blossom over time as you continue to practice.



Exercises

You've got some ideas about drawing and life. You've got the fundamentals. You've got a procedure to help you put the fundamentals together. Now you just need some basic ways to help you practice. In the absence of not knowing what to do, oftentimes people (and I am guilty) will sit and wait for clarity before doing anything. Rarely does anyone get better by waiting. This chapter of the book is designed to give you some ideas of ways to practice. There's a lot of technical information in the previous sections of the book, but don't let yourself get overwhelmed or paralyzed. Knowing the information is just the first step to applying the information and as you apply it over time you will gain real power.

All of the exercises I recommend are exercises that I have done for hundreds, if not thousands, of hours over the last decade. If you can, try to do one exercise as often as possible for a period of time. Draw fruit for a few months then move on to something else. You'll find yourself gaining a bigger benefit if you stick with it for a while. Over time, simple things become intuitive so your mind can focus on harder problems. Of course, as often as you can practice, the faster you will improve, but the important thing is to just do as much as you can. Don't put the pressure on yourself to do too much and then beat yourself up when it doesn't happen. Just do what you can now.

One thing to make sure of when you draw is that your paper is at a 90 degree angle to your eyes. Don't set the paper on a tabletop, put it on a board or something hard and prop it so you are looking straight at it.

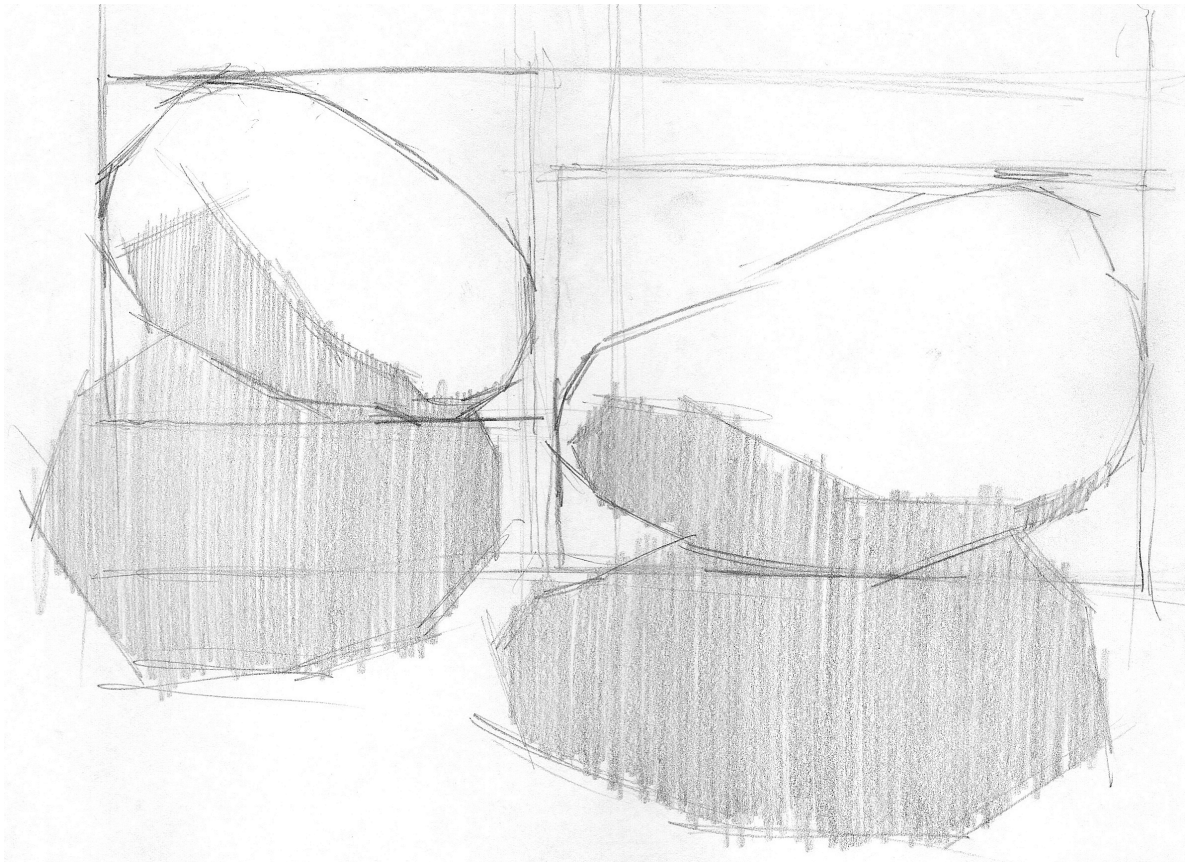
Another note about the exercises is that they are simple things you can do to help yourself understand basic principles. The exercises will help you with particular things. If you find yourself struggling with a problem, find an exercise that will help you work on it. One of the most toxic mindsets a person can get into is to avoid things that they are unfamiliar with. I meet a lot of artists who say, "I've just never been good at drawing _____, so I never draw _____." This is a circular logic of failure that a person will never escape. If you wish you were better at drawing _____, draw it! If you aren't very good at _____, and avoid it, you'll never get better at drawing _____! This attitude is setting yourself up for a lifetime of never getting good and enjoying _____. Forget what you think you're good at. Forget what you think you can do. All that matters is a desire to get better so much that it drives you to practice. You'll learn about yourself and life in the process. When you consider the alternative, doing nothing and reaping nothing as a reward, I'm not sure why anyone would ever settle for less.

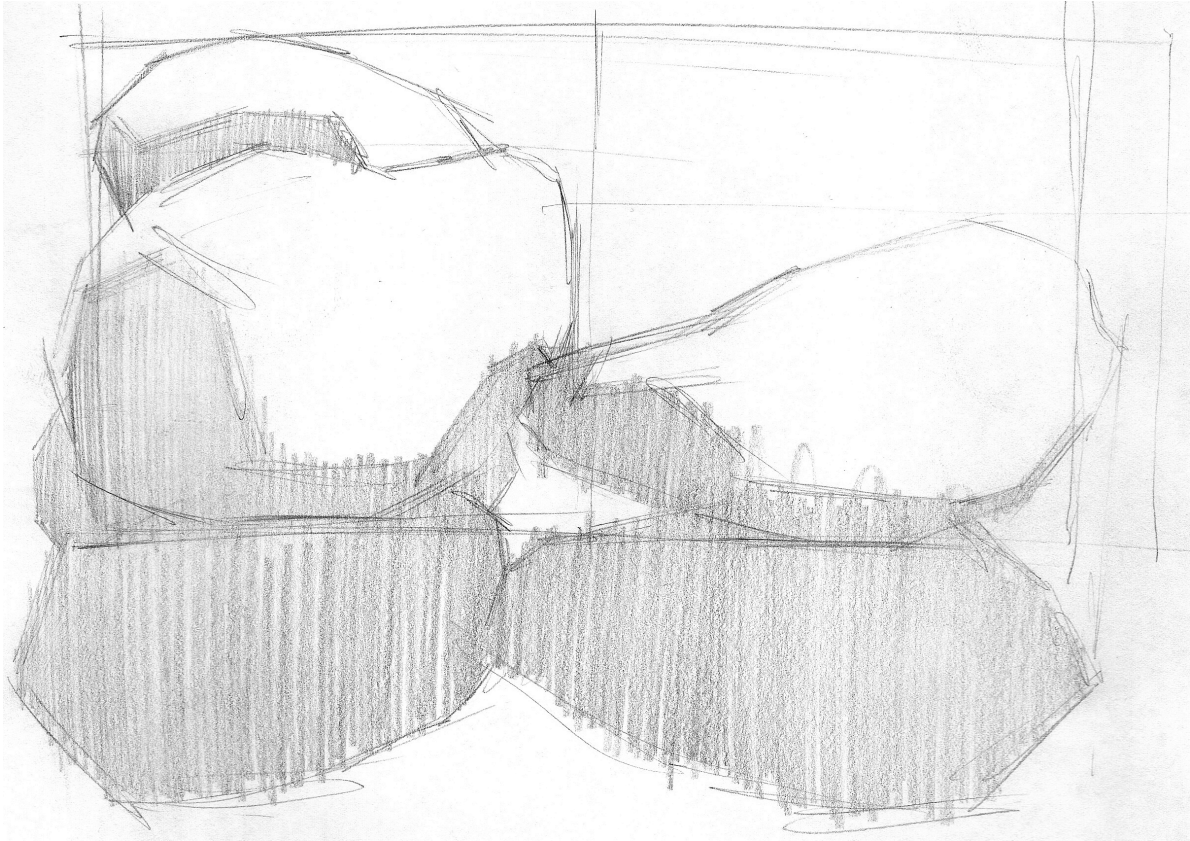
“The world, -- this shadow of the soul, or other me, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.” –Ralph Waldo Emerson in the essay “The American Scholar”



Drawing Fruit

This is a simple place to begin. I've used this as the example of procedure, drawing the apple. All that is important in doing this is to make sure you have a good light source set up. A single overhead light, even the light over the kitchen table, is fine. Practice your procedure. Practice simple measurements. As you get better at drawing a simple piece of fruit, you can mix it up by adding other kinds of fruit, or more fruit. You can then compare values of the different fruits with each other, or work on more complex measurements with many pieces of fruit. I love this exercise as a place to start because anyone can do it. I bought a pear at the store yesterday for 41 cents. I can have 4 fruits to practice drawing from for ten days for a couple bucks. This exercise is unlimited, you can draw however many fruits in however many ways to practice your problem solving abilities. The only difference between drawing a fruit and drawing a portrait is in the number of problems you are presented with. The more you can organize the problems with the fruit, the more confidence and capabilities you will have when presented with the portrait. If you're feeling adventurous, after some practice with the fruit, you can get a plaster cast and keep drawing under a strong light. You'll see a couple cast drawings I have put in this book. The following are studies of mangoes I did, explaining measuring to a student, at the kitchen table.

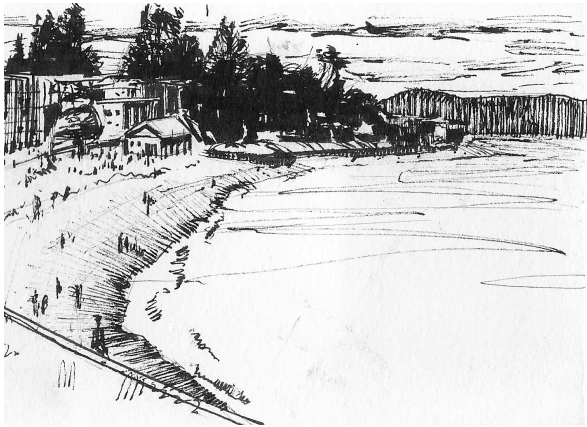




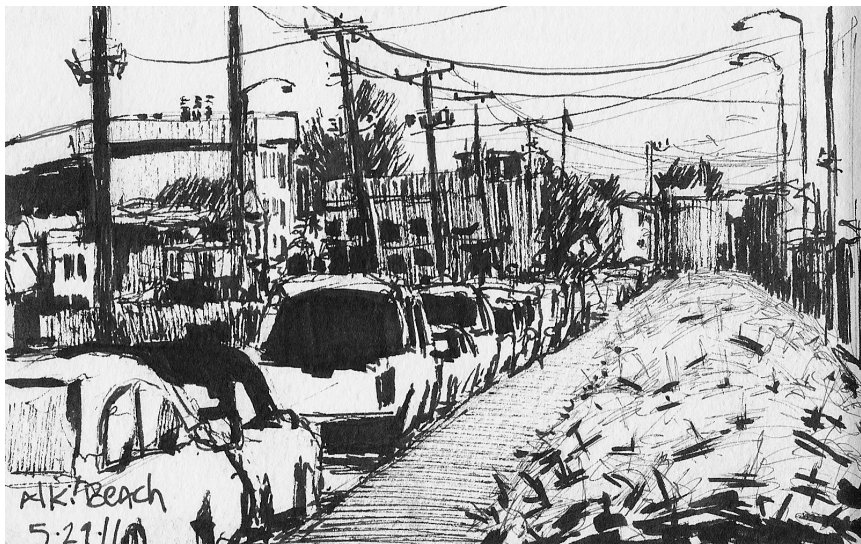
Ink Sketching

I got turned onto this exercise by my friend Ray Seitz. All you need is a small sketchbook and some sort of pen/marker. You can use a sharpie or you can use a fancier brush pen or pen set. The materials don't matter so much, just get out there and do some sketching (or pack the small book with you and take it out when you have time to kill). I use a small sketchbook, 3.5" x 5.5", and a small pack of pens.

I do little landscape drawings out and about when I have some time. The point of the black and white drawing is to learn to simplify the values and lines. When you only have black and white to work with, you have to decide what is light enough to be white, and what is dark enough to be black. This is a great exercise for squinting and comparing values with one another. It's also great for learning to compose the landscape on the page. If you want to get fancy, you can add a shade of grey or two, after you have practiced just the black and white, to learn to organize the values further. Learning how to abstract what you are seeing into just black and white will greatly improve your drawing, and even painting, abilities.



Alki Beach 5.29.11



Alki Beach
5.29.11



Republican + Melrose
6.6.11



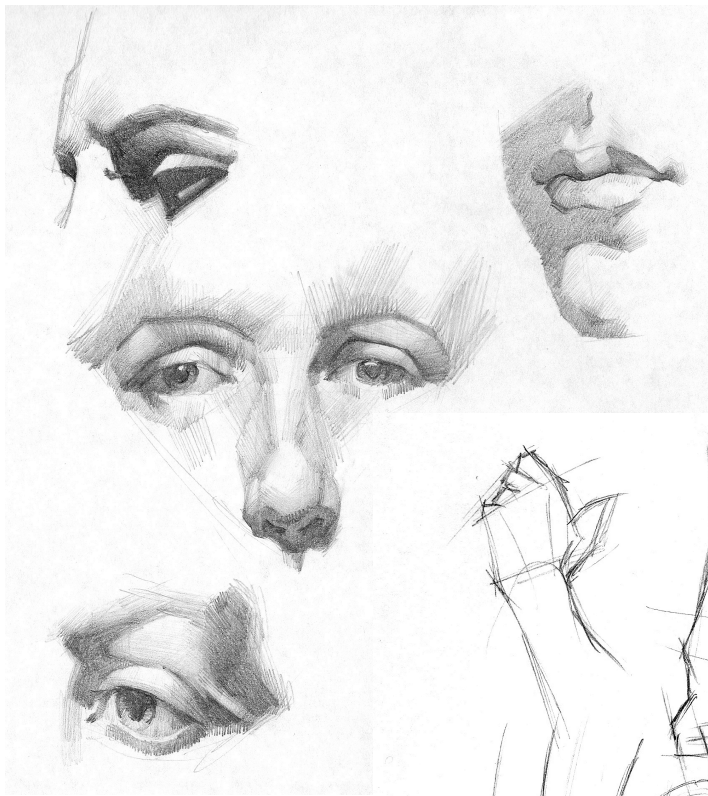
6.6.11 North of Melrose

Master Copies

It has been a practice for hundreds of years to copy an artist's work whom you admire. It's as simple as that, you find a work that you enjoy and you copy it. There is no need to make it complex. Set the drawing next to your paper and do your best to reproduce it as it looks. If the drawing is a little fancier, try to find out what materials were used so you can do your best to reproduce it, otherwise just use something simple. You can copy a drawing to get a better understanding of technique or style, you can copy to get a better understanding of how an artist handled specific problems, or you can copy a drawing to learn something specific; anatomy, simplification, perspective, etc.

I have done hundreds of copies over the years. I'll copy a full drawing, or parts. I've copied through full books to learn anatomy, or just copied one drawing by an artist who did one piece of exceptional work. You can learn all sorts of things from doing copies. The following are copies of Yim Mau Kun (to learn some of his style and line direction), John Vanderpoel (to learn form, value, and facial anatomy), and Charles Bargue (to learn the simplification of hands and feet).





One final thing on copying other artists.. there's nothing wrong with learning from other artists and there's nothing wrong with leaning on their abilities a small amount as you are learning. Great artists have done this for centuries. However, you don't want to get to the point where you end up as a poor copier of another artist. You have the capability to develop your own style, your own way of working, and to say all of your own thoughts and ideas in life. Aside from the pathetic stealing of others ideas or styles, the sad part about the overuse or overreliance on copying is that the artist never allows his or her own style to come to the forefront. We all have artists that we admire. Who is to say that after a lifetime of work that our own work wouldn't equal or surpass theirs? Lean on other artists as much as it is helpful, but do so with the goal of standing on your own two feet in the end.

Books I would recommend copying from:

"The Human Figure" John Vanderpoel

"Bridgman's Complete Guide to Drawing from Life" George B. Bridgman

"Anatomy for the Artist" Jeno Barcsay

"Figure Drawing for all it's worth." Andrew Loomis

"Sargent Portrait Drawing" 42 works by John Singer Sargent

Self Portrait

You are the person who is always willing to sit for yourself. Set up a mirror and a light (many of my recent self portraits have been done in the bathroom with a cheap single clamp light purchased from a hardware store) and give it a go. A trick with self portraits is that we have particular ways that we see ourselves, so it's an exercise in actually observing yourself. After some time in front of a mirror, you'll slowly learn new things about yourself. It's also a great chance to say something about yourself. What would you like people to see, just by looking at a drawing of you?

Go to a Life Drawing Session

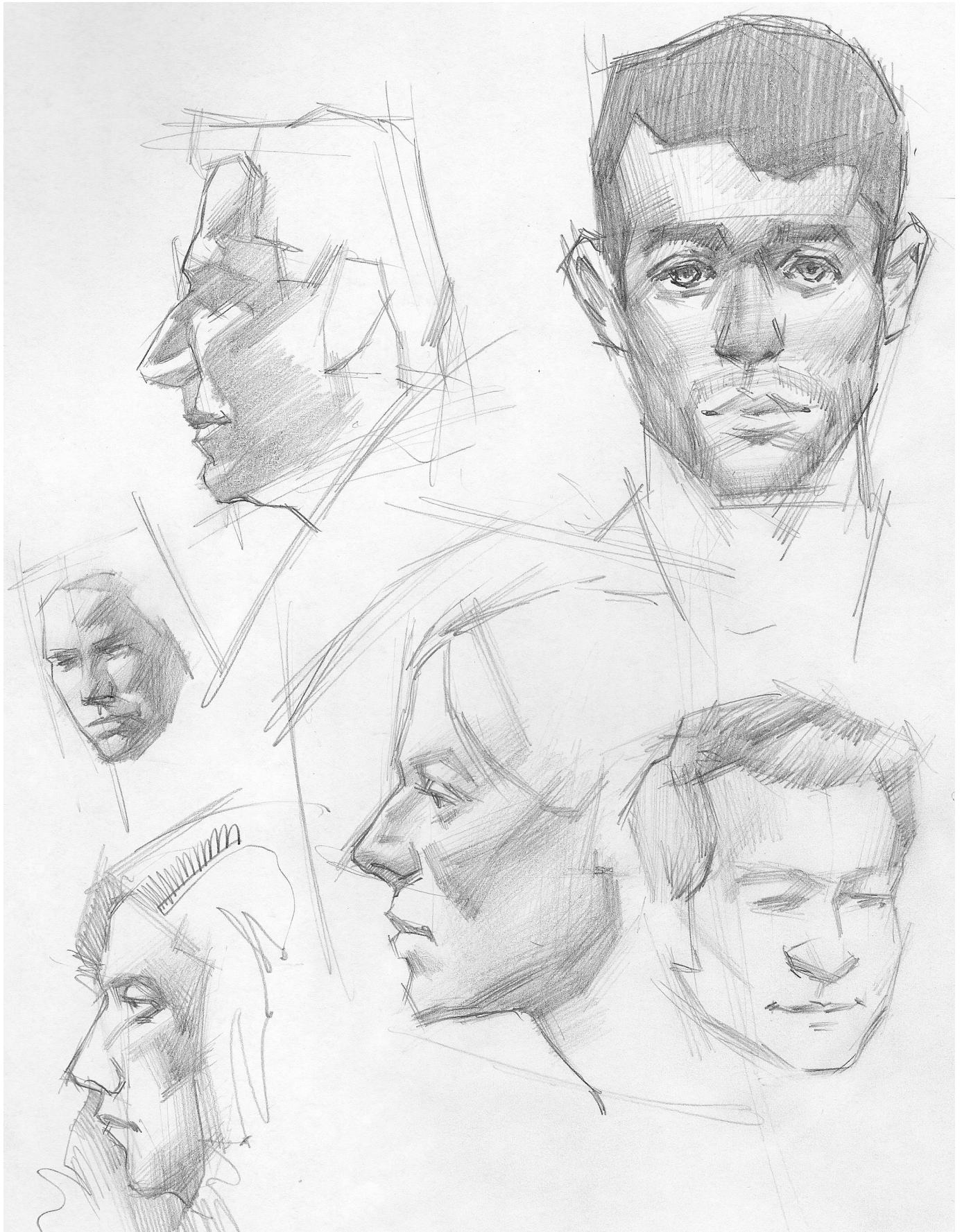
Look around art schools, galleries, community spaces, and classifieds for open life drawing sessions in your area. For a small fee, usually around 10 bucks, you will get three hours in front of a live, usually nude, model. This is the ultimate exercise, as far as learning to draw from life.

Drawing people is one of the greatest challenges of the artist. You can misrepresent a tree and nobody will likely notice but if you draw somebody's face awkwardly, everyone will be able to see. It is a massive challenge but it is also extremely fun and rewarding. Don't put too much pressure on yourself and don't worry too much about what other people are doing. Just go in there and do your thing. I have been going to life drawing sessions for years and I just put in my headphones, ignore people, and get to work. I am sure that some people, especially people who see me there on a regular basis, imagine that I am unfriendly. I'm not, I'm just there to do work, and I have to maintain my emotional integrity. I am trying hard to focus on the model, on my feelings, and on doing the best work. I can't be distracting myself with talking about the weather and cookies with every person in the session though I realize that different people go for different reasons. Some people just enjoy the experience. Some people are there to make friends. Whatever is the case and whatever are your reasons, just go do your thing. Don't think about what other people have going on, focus on your work and make the most out of it.

One thing to keep an eye out for is that the session has a decent lighting setup. It's no good to go somewhere to pay to draw when you cannot get any sort of contrast in your drawing. There needs to be some sort of direct light on the model and there needs to be some sort of good ambient lighting on the artists' easels. If the lighting sucks, don't bother. Great artists won't waste their time if they cannot see their surface, or the model, so why would you want to learn in that kind of environment? You wouldn't.

Random Sketching

Lastly, just sketch whenever you can. This doesn't really need a title or section of its own. I always carry my clipboard with paper in my backpack. Whenever I find myself with time to kill, it turns into sketch time. Countless coffee shops (while people are waiting in line), bus stops, airports, restaurants, and even just lounging around a friends' place have all become venues to break out the clipboard and get some sketching in. It doesn't have to be official. It doesn't have to be planned. It's just another opportunity to sharpen your mind and your eyes and work out some of the organizational problems that you face every time you pick up the pencil. The more you do it, the more confidence you get. The more confidence you get, the more you do it. The more you do it, the more powerful you become. Also, I haven't mentioned this throughout the book because it should be obvious, but do not forget to have fun! Don't forget to enjoy what you are doing! Have a good time with what you are doing and it won't really seem like work at all! (examples of coffee shop sketches on the following page)



Final Thoughts

With an understanding of the fundamentals in this book, and the ability to apply them (developed over time through consistent practice), you should be able to draw anything. However, just because you can draw anything doesn't mean you would *want* to draw anything. Some things in the world don't lend themselves to very good drawings. A wall of trees. An overcast sky. A polar bear in a snowstorm. You're welcome to try to draw these, or any other thing imaginable, but don't put the pressure on yourself to have to draw everything. I remember when I first started I would struggle to draw particular things which I would never bother to attempt now, just because they aren't very suitable to be drawn. In order for something to be suitable to be drawn, it has to have some sort of variance in the lighting (usually some simple light source with a decent contrast works best), and some discernable shapes. Be bold in attempting anything that suits your fancy but be aware that not everything in the world is going to make a great drawing. Choosing a powerful subject will go a long way toward making a powerful drawing.

I was asked in one of my recent classes if I ever get a student with "real potential". It's a reasonable enough question, by conventional ways of thinking, but I think we have yet to really understand potential. Potential is only a hint, or trace, of a future reward to be reaped. In the class, I have students who are in their 50's, and one girl who is 13. Who has the greatest potential? Conventional wisdom would have us believe that young people have all the potential in the world. Older people may as well sit down where they are at and wait to expire. Theoretically, I suppose the young girl has the most potential because she has the most years of her life left to put the most effort into the things she desires but the real answer to the question is that it is impossible for me to tell who has the most potential. For all I know, she could finish my class and never draw again. An older student could still have 20, 30 years of their life left to pursue the thing they love and actually do it. In order for potential to have any meaning, it has to be realized. In order to realize potential, we have to continue to work at the thing. The only important qualities, when considering potential, are not the age, or current skill of the artist, but the attitude, temperament, humility, work ethic, and **desire** of the artist. The one who is most willing to see the task to the end is the one most likely to complete the task. We might think there are countless factors in society standing in the way of us (and not others) and our goals. We are probably wrong. Anything worthwhile is difficult to achieve for anyone, it's only a difference of degree. I find that most people often stop themselves before they ever even get a chance to find out if they are capable of accomplishing the thing or not. As soon as you tell yourself you cannot do it, you are finished.

I tell people at every one of my workshops and classes that there are two ways to get better at drawing. One, which you are doing now, is learning about the technical ways in which you can get better at drawing. Improving your technical skills and abilities will give you all kinds of flexibility in any future expression, just as an increase in the command of your language gives you all kinds of options for better articulation. But there is another way to get better at drawing, or better at anything, which we do not often think about. You can get better at drawing by improving your life, or improving the way in which you live. We all have three aspects to our being that we use in everything; our mind, body, and spirit. Even a strict physical improvement, a getting-into-shape, will allow you to be more attentive, capable, and able to put more force into the work. Imagine the improvements that your mind and spirit can have? If you want to say something with your drawing, it's not enough to just learn how to draw, you've got to have something to say.

This boils down to the crux of art. All good art is some sort of storytelling, some sort of communication about the human experience. Art isn't about abstract concepts. Art isn't about "exploring spatial relationships". Art is about being human. This exposes the ultimate fallacy of modern art, with it's lengthy explanations next to the work, critics, and documentaries to translate the meaning to the viewer. Real art needs no explanation. It is a powerful communication from the piece to the viewer. If you cannot understand the meaning of a visual work by looking at it, or if the meaning appears so broad as to be everything (and thereby, nothing), then the meaning is that the story sucks. It means that the artist is a terrible storyteller. Poor communication cannot be good art (if it can be art at all).

A straight way to have powerful art is to have a powerful life. If you want to say something about life, you have to have something to say to begin with. You need to have passions, you need to have emotions, you need to have thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Nobody can give this to you, you have to set out and find it yourself. You have to get smart and passionate. You have to develop your spirit and your body. You have to get out and live. Take a risk. Do something different. Try a new experience. Meet some new people. Attempt a new adventure. Live. Then pick up the pencil or brush and tell us about it.

Once you get yourself going, then you can lead by example. Artists are individuals. Hopefully through our work, we can show people the way, show them that it is possible to think for oneself, show them that it is possible to be unique, inspire them to dare, and try, and experience life! I am always disappointed when an artist (or any person with a brain) endorses a political party. Especially in their current form, political parties are not about ideals, principles, freedom, or individuality. They're about constraint, control, and compliance; the exact opposite of art. As an artist (or a person with a brain) you can do better. Political parties need artists, not the other way around. As artists, we should be inspiring people to experience and understand life for themselves, not to conform.

There are many more ways to achieve excellence in this lifetime that have never been attempted. You never know what is possible in life until you get out there and go for it. Who can say what your potential is? Who can say what is in store for you? Who can say what you can achieve? Nobody, not even yourself, can know what is store for you. But only you can decide to find out. I hope you end the book inspired to draw and inspired to learn. I think anyone can become proficient at drawing. Even further, I hope you are inspired to dream, inspired to think for yourself, inspired to dare, and inspired to live. Every morning you wake up on the precipice of the rest of your life. It is up to you to decide what you want and to perform the action to make it so. You can make anything out of your life. You are the only you who will ever exist in the history of existence. If you discipline yourself to learn how to communicate and experience life fully so as to have something to say, only you will be capable of your expression. Live fully, then show us a glimpse of it through your work.



Recommended Books

(Art Books)

“Alla Prima” by Richard Schmid
“The Landscapes” by Richard Schmid
“Carlson’s Guide to Landscape Painting” by John F. Carlson
“Landscape Painting” by Mitchell Albala
“Classical Drawing Atelier” by Juliette Aristides
“The Human Figure” by John Vanderpoel
“Bridgman’s Complete Guide to Drawing From Life” George B. Bridgman
“Anatomy for the Artist” by Jeno Barcsay
“The Art Spirit” by Robert Henri
“Drawing Course” by Charles Bargue
“Figure Drawing for all it’s Worth” by Andrew Loomis
Anything by Yim Mau Kun
“Sketchbooks” by Bill Mather
“Dirty Beauty” by William Wray
“The Art of Star Wars, Episode 1” (and 2)
“Watercolors of John Singer Sargent”
“The Skillful Huntsman”
“Robota” by Doug Chiang
“Dinotopia” by James Gurney

(Books that have influenced me)

“Civil Disobedience” and “Walden” by Henry David Thoreau

Any essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The Fountainhead” and “Atlas Shrugged” by Ayn Rand

“The Alchemist” and “The Pilgrimage” by Paulo Coelho

“Think and Grow Rich” by Napoleon Hill

“Warriors of God” by James Reston Jr.

“Blink” by Malcolm Gladwell

“The Art of War” by Sun Tzu

“Blue Like Jazz” by Don Miller

The Bible

“1984” by George Orwell

“Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens

“The Tao of Jeet Kune Do” by Bruce Lee

“Rollback” by Thomas E Woods Jr.

“Blankets” by Craig Thompson

“End The Fed” by Ron Paul

“The War of Art” by Steven Pressfield

“Caesar” by Adrian Goldsworthy

“Bruce Lee: Fighting Spirit” by Bruce Thomas

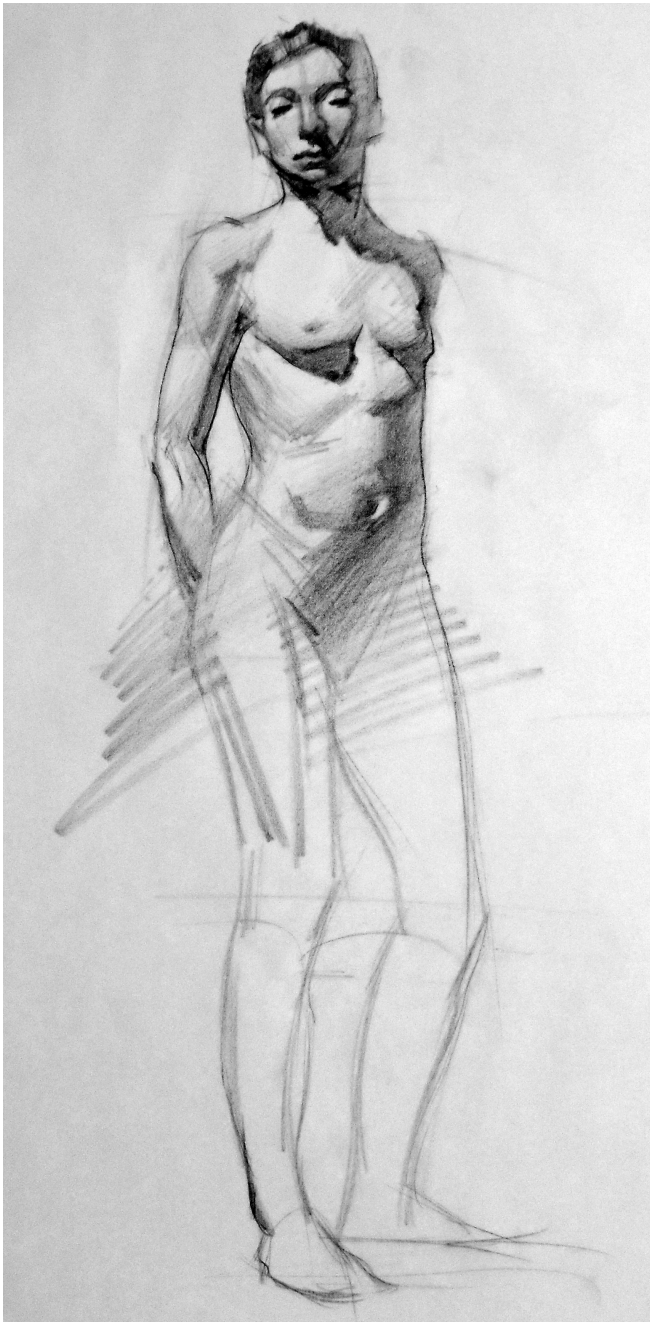
“Aftershock” by David and Robert Wiedemer, and Cindy S. Spitzer

“The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood” by Howard Pyle

“Genghis Kahn and the Making of the Modern World” by Jack Weatherford

“Crazy Love” by Francis Chan

“Family and Civilization” by Carle Zimmerman



About the artist

I did a little bit of drawing growing up. I doodled here and there when I was bored in school. I had a couple lessons from a private tutor, and took some art classes in school. Nothing very consistent, serious, or extraordinary. In the 5th grade, myself and this other kid both liked the same girl. She decided that whoever could draw the best shark would get to be her boyfriend. I didn't get to be her boyfriend. It was a harsh commentary on my drawing abilities; sharks in particular. My artistic aspirations were off to a rough start. In the 10th grade, I loved my art teacher but she said she was leaving the school. I told her if she left, I would never take another art class. She left and I didn't take another art class...

..Until I was 19. I had decided to attempt to be an animator, without having really drawn anything in years, and found myself at the Art Institute of Seattle. Four months into classes, one of my instructors said to me, "This would be much easier if you learned how to draw". It made sense, so I went and bought a sketchbook, sat down in the Westlake bus tunnel almost every day, and drew glorified stick figures four hours at a time. From that point on, I was hooked on drawing from life.

After the animation industry tanked, I graduated, and worked some odd jobs. I moved down to San Diego to study at Watts Atelier where my real education began. I studied at Watts for about a year and a half, then studied at Studio Second Street for a year and a half, and then got busy with working and paying off medical bills. I ended up luring myself into a 2.5 year hiatus from art. After I lost momentum, I lost confidence, and quit working on my skills. I told myself that I would draw once I had more practice. Obviously, that makes nonsense, since there's no way to get practice without drawing, but I told that to myself for 2 years or so.

I found myself in an unhappy place. I got rid of almost everything I had, restructured my life to pursue art, and was blessed with supporting parents to move in with. I moved in with my parents, just south of Seattle, and began to work on my drawing again.

Now I am drawing, painting, writing, and teaching full time, in between exploring life, finding adventures, and getting into trouble. I am available for commission work, private lessons, and teaching classes or workshops. I can be reached at Michael@EndlessUnlimited.com.

I am a one man operation. There's no million dollars or massive corporation behind me or the book. If you've enjoyed it, please share with your friends. You can support my endeavors by checking my website: <http://www.EndlessUnlimited.com> Join the discussion on the blog, check out the podcast, keep an eye out for more books, and pass the word along. Think and act for yourself. Get powerful, peeps!

